

Implementing a Ricoeurian lens to examine the impact of individuals' worldviews on subject content knowledge in RE in England: a theoretical proposition.

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This article recognises that for increasing numbers of teachers with no faith, religion may seem alien, and this may impact their choice of subject content knowledge. Teachers may, subconsciously, choose to teach aspects of religion(s) and non-religious worldviews which adhere to their own worldviews but ignore aspects with which they disagree. This theoretical article aims to examine the relationality between teachers' personal worldviews and their choice of subject content knowledge for inclusion into their RE teaching. Current literature on worldviews and RE, alongside research into teachers' professional knowledge, is examined in the first section of this article to commence investigation into this relationality. Implementing a Ricoeurian lens provides theoretical insight into the relationality between teachers' personal worldviews and their professional knowledge, in particular their subject content knowledge. For teachers lack of subject content knowledge may be viewed as an insurmountable problem for effective RE teaching. Yet what constitutes teachers' professional knowledge itself is questionable as is the relationality between personal worldviews and choice of subject content knowledge. This article recommends the provision of support for teachers to become *worldview conscious* to illuminate these (un)conscious omissions of religion(s) and non-religious worldviews and challenge any unexamined bias.

Keywords: worldviews; knowledge; beliefs; value-ladenness; worldview conscious.

Introduction

'You can't say that!' remarked a teacher, reporting her frustration with a faith choir who sang at her school. They offered to attend RE lessons and answer any questions that the pupils posed. However, she was offended by their responses to some questions and said if she had realised they believed those views she would never have let them speak in her RE lessons.

Since the 1944 Education Act, RE has been enshrined in law as a compulsory subject in all state funded schools, in England, but yet without a clear purpose: the law 'has nothing clear to say about why' (Castelli and Chater, 2018, 74). The subject has undergone many adaptations including changes of name and pedagogical approaches: from Religious Instruction (RI), often through confessional albeit non-denominational teaching, to Religious Education (RE) which evolved to a more non-confessional approach including the study of other faiths, after the publication of the highly influential Birmingham syllabus (1975). Over the years a range of pedagogical approaches for RE have been championed: from Phenomenological (Smart, 1968), Ethnographic and Interpretive (Jackson, 1997), to the more recent Dialogic approach (Freathy et al, 2015)¹. The Commission on RE final report (CoRE, 2018) recommended changing the name again to 'Religion and worldviews' and producing a national entitlement for RE.

Despite these attempts at improving the subject, RE in England has been deemed as being poorly taught (Ofsted, 2013) due to: teachers' lack of confidence; poor subject knowledge (Wintersgill, 2004); negative attitudes; and a watering down of the subject of RE (Copley, 2005). I contend that RE is in danger of being impacted by teachers'

personal worldviews influencing their choice of subject content knowledge (SCK), as witnessed to in the above anecdote. Teachers' choice of SCK is impacted by confusion as to the rationale and purpose of the subject: in part due to the evolutionary journey of RE, and the lack of legal clarity regarding its purpose. The website 'RE: Online' presents 8 different rationales for the subject and Ofsted uncovered 'confusion about the purpose of RE' (2013, 4) at primary level. Additionally, the RE curriculum is fluid and varied due to being designed through locally Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASC), as RE stands outside of the National Curriculum, and is revised every 5 years. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were charged with the formation of locally agreed syllabuses which have evolved, alongside educational research and socio-political change. Curriculum and content choices are made by Standing Advisory Councils for RE (SACREs), diocesan syllabuses, examination boards, schools in their schemes of work and programmes of study as well as teachers' choice.

In RE, a lack of knowledge was identified by Ofsted (2013) and Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) as key to the failure of the subject to realise its potential. They identified not only a lack of SCK but lack of knowledge about the subject of RE, including purposes, rationale and pedagogical approaches.

'Teachers' input too often lacks substance and depth' with 'insufficient explanation...Equally serious is teachers' lack of knowledge about the subject, its purpose, aims and most appropriate pedagogies (Wintersgill, 2004:1).

Responses to these challenges may be found in examination of teachers' personal worldviews and the interplay between these and their professional knowledge,

specifically their choice of SCK to be included in their RE teaching. This article proposes a working definition for worldviews, examines current literature on worldviews and RE, discusses teachers' professional knowledge and investigates the theoretical relationality between the two, employing a Ricoeurian lens. SCK, an aspect of professional knowledge, in RE, in England, is more open to interpretation and choice than in those subjects included in the National Curriculum: decisions are frequently made on what SCK is to be taught, by teachers, subject leads, schools, examination boards and SACREs without acknowledgement, of or investigation into, the impact of individuals' personal worldviews on these choices.

A proposed definition of 'personal worldviews'

The term worldview is employed extensively, yet not always adequately explained, and has developed in meaning over time since early uses, such as Kant's (1790) use in German, 'weltanschauung'. The CoRE report (2018, 4) delineates between 'personal' and 'institutional' worldviews in recognition of the complexity of identifying, developing and defining worldviews.

Worldview, as a term, is found in a range of literature with differing definitions. For example, from the field of literature, Tolstoy, in a letter in 1901, in defence of his work 'Resurrection', claimed that what concerns him when he reads a book is the 'Weltanschauung des Autors' which he defines simply as 'what he (*the author*) likes and what he hates' (1901, vii). This somewhat limited definition is echoed in the few resources for schools on worldviews (Huddleston, 2007). Yet in other academic disciplines more complex definitions of the term exist, including sociologist Lappe's 'map of the mind' (Lappe and Lappe, 2003, 9); in political science with Olsen's system

to guide its adherents through the social landscape (Olsen et al, 1992); in religious studies with Walsh and Middleton's 'model of the world which guides its adherents in the world' (1984, 32); or in intercultural communication with Samovar and Porter's 'meaning overarching philosophy or outlook or concept of the world' (2004, 103). These overlap to provide some insight into the complex and contested nature of the concept.

Worldviews contain an explanation of the world, a futurology, values and answers to ethical issues, a praxeology, an epistemology, and aetiology. In developing a working definition for worldviews I contend that worldviews are frameworks for individuals to make sense of the world (Aerts et al, 2007) and I recognise the eclectic nature of many individuals' personal embodied worldviews. I employ the term 'embodied' as worldviews evolve due to life experiences and are lived out in individuals' lives. A helpful basis for this definition is found in Aerts et al, who, building on Apostel's extensive philosophical work, defined worldviews as:

A system of co-ordinates or a frame of reference in which everything presented to us by our diverse experiences can be placed. It is a symbolic system of representation that allows us to integrate everything we know about the world and ourselves into a global picture, one that illuminates reality as it is presented to us within a certain culture. (2007, 7)

Whilst this provides a basis for understanding worldviews a further useful dimension has been noted by Van der Kooij et al (2013) who draw key distinctions between 'personal' worldviews, with norms, values, ideals and practices, and 'organised' worldviews as the

RE commission report (2018) echoes with their use of the alternative, yet similar, term ‘institutional’. ‘Organised’ worldviews such as humanism, secularism, capitalism, materialism, have defined nationally or internationally recognised sets of beliefs and values – a frame of reference (Aerts et al, 2007) – reaffirmed by a recognisable group and often embedded in institutions. Investigating the connection between worldviews and professional practice led Valk (2009) to create a framework tool for worldview identification which he has implemented in management and leadership training courses. Valk (2009)’s framework tool for worldview identification highlights many of these organised worldviews. As with religions there can be a spectrum of views contained within each one². It is precisely this spectrum of views which leads onto the examination of personal worldviews.

Globalisation and migration have broken down national metanarratives. The ‘disintegration of master narratives’ (Riessman, 2008, 17), with uncertainty and unrest in the world, has led to an increase in prominence of the individual’s narrative: ‘as people make sense of experience, claim identities...by telling and writing their stories’ (Langellier, 2001, 699-700). This deems fixed compartmentalised worldviews as less relevant, perhaps less appropriate to study, as they may no longer be viewed as unified or codified bodies of knowledge, values or beliefs. The disintegration of these master narratives has led to a rise in individuals creating, albeit subconsciously, bespoke, individual, embodied worldviews. An individual's attempt to make sense of the world in real life situations - an embodied worldview, the lived essence of self, is a living organism adapting to the challenges and experiences the individual faces and evolves accordingly.

These personal worldviews may be based on an organised religious worldview but can be eclectic and idiosyncratic. Indeed, Van der Kooij et al (2013, 213-214) borrow the term ‘bricoleurs’ from Hervieu-Leger (2006). ‘Bricolage’ is described as a ‘mishmash’ of ideas, symbols and practises from different traditions which are moulded together to construct a personal religious profile. Whilst they are expressing a particular, and derogatory, interpretation of bricolage I have seen this eclectic evolution or ‘fusion’ of ideas in the worldviews expressed by students and teachers. Van der Kooij et al (2013) do caution that if a teachers’ prejudice against, or personal aversion to, certain worldviews dominate their teaching this will interfere with the pupils’ learning about and reflecting on these worldviews (2013, 225). This highlights the benefits for teachers in identifying their worldviews so they can heighten awareness of and attempt to address personal bias before teaching.

Personal worldviews may incorporate aspects of a broad range of ‘organised’ worldviews: for example, an individual’s personal worldview may incorporate aspects of Secularism, Humanism and Christianity which, though contradicting each other at times, may remain alongside each other in creative tension. These worldviews have evolved over time due to life experiences and, as recognised by the CoRE report (2018), these life experiences should be given greater attention:

The shift in language from ‘religion’ to ‘worldview’ signifies the greater attention that needs to be paid to **individual lived experience**, the complex, plural and diverse nature of worldviews at both institutional and individual levels, and the extension of the subject beyond six major world faiths and humanism (2018, 5).

These lived experiences yield evidence of the evolution of individuals' worldviews and provide examples for why differences may exist in response to shared human experience. Worldview may be viewed as a concept that makes sense of the world which evolves according to changing life experiences. Worldviews may contain core and peripheral views, some more malleable or more resistant to change than others. What one individual views as the 'norms' of life may merely be a product of their own life narrative and worldview. The views of other people, far from being negatively perceived as 'other', 'exotic' or even 'wrong' because they deviate from their accepted norm, may be viewed as a shared and valid response to life experience.

These personal worldviews inform individuals' meaning of life and their behaviour within their culture and, crucially, may impact the teachers' view of SCK in RE in terms of what is 'good' RE.

Existing Literature on worldviews and RE

Research has been conducted into the relationship between teachers' personal worldviews about pupils and their treatment of those pupils: including gender (Myhill and Jones, 2006), ethnicity (Stewart and Payne, 2008, Lavy and Sand, 2015) and socioeconomic background (Auwarter and Aruguete, 2008). Yet, research into how teachers' personal worldviews impact their views and choice of SCK are less evident. Notable exceptions are the interpretive approach (Jackson, 1997), the life history of the teacher (Sikes and Everington, 2004), the professional identity and personal knowledge of the teacher (Sikes and Everington, 2003 and Everington, 2012), the lack of neutrality

for teachers (Revell and Walters, 2010 and Bryan and Revell, 2011) and the professional knowledge of the teacher (Freathy et al, 2014).

Yet much of this existing research is focused on specialist secondary RE teachers (those trained in the subject to degree level) and there is very little research on the role of non-specialists or primary teachers of RE. Furthermore, gaps exist in the literature in that research on identifying personal worldviews focuses on pupils (Jackson, 1997, Larkin et al, 2014) rather than teachers. Research which exists into teachers' worldviews focuses on their professional identity as an RE teacher (Sikes and Everington, 2003, 2004), personal knowledge of the teacher (Everington, 2012) and professional knowledge of the teacher (Freathy et al, 2014) rather than being specifically concerned with the potential impact of the teachers' personal worldviews on their SCK choices. Revell and Walters (2010) and Bryan and Revell's (2011) work highlights the need to examine teachers' personal worldviews with their conclusion of the ambiguity of teacher objectivity. A potential next step for research is to examine the potential impact of teachers' personal worldviews on their teaching in terms of their view of 'good' SCK in RE.

The Interpretive Approach, championed by Jackson (1997), promoted viewing religions flexibly, taking note of relationships between individuals within specific contexts and wider religious traditions. As part of this approach comparison is conducted between the learners' concepts and those of individuals from within religious communities (Jackson, 1997). This necessitates examination of self to understand one's own preconceptions before being able to understand the preconceptions of others: as I would put it, becoming *worldview conscious*. Jackson's (1997) research, into the teaching of RE and pupils' ability to be aware of their own worldviews, provides an insight into the process of

worldview identification and its impact, from the pupils' perspective. He recommends that RE is taught by specialists and applauds the way in which RE teachers are 'impartial' (1997: 136): 'prepared to countenance rival conclusions as well as those to which they are personally attached'. Yet many RE teachers are non-specialists: according to the Department for Education only 57.6% per cent of secondary RE teachers in England hold a degree in a relevant subject (2019). Lack of specialist training has been found to impact the quality of RE: 'seriously reduces the quality of provision' (Wintersgill, 2004, 1). I agree with Jackson's intentions yet I propose that teachers may well need assistance in examining their deeply held personal worldviews, particularly those who are non-specialists and perhaps therefore have not been trained to teach religions 'impartially'. Teachers need to identify their own preconceptions, or worldviews, and the impact these may have on their teaching, before they can enable pupils to achieve the same.

Everington's (2012) research into RE teachers' knowledge examines teachers' personal life knowledge. Whilst her research is conducted with secondary RE teaching, her work demonstrates the potential benefits and dangers of teachers employing their own life experience within their RE teaching. Everington differentiates between two categories of knowledge: knowledge with a strong factual element but based on personal experience and knowledge with a strong experiential dimension but including factual knowledge (2012, 346). Her primary concern seems to be to create a bridge between teachers' personal and professional identities (2012, 352), between the pupils and their teacher and between the personal life knowledge of the pupils and the religions studied in RE (2012, 349). Recognition of what has helped teachers to understand and make sense of new information or concepts was seen to assist in their teaching (2012, 348).

Everington's research, whilst helpful in evidencing links between the teachers' personal lived experience and their RE teaching, is concerned with methodology and not SCK. Yet this research assists in making the connection between teachers recognising aspects of their own worldviews and this knowledge enabling their teaching to become more effective.

In their research into the ambiguities of teachers' objectivity, Bryan and Revell (2011) concluded that, far from neutral positions, teachers are a product of their own background, experiences, faith and education.

The pervasiveness of a secular paradigm coupled with a performative culture within education generates a culture whose secular norms characterise all mores within teaching (2011, 407).

The ability to identify this as a worldview, which may form part of the teacher's own worldview, rather than accept this as the 'norm' may be the initial step towards recognising the impact of teachers' personal worldviews on their RE teaching.

As teachers become conscious of their worldviews, developing *worldview consciousness*, this may illuminate any potential impact of their personal worldviews on their choices within RE and provide teachers with a system, or scaffold, from which to read the worldviews of others. The initial example of the teacher, offended by the faith choir, bemoaning the fact that she had allowed them to speak in her RE lesson demonstrates this well. SCK was potentially stymied by her own personal worldview. For this teacher becoming *worldview conscious* may well have enabled her to see this

inextricable link between what she saw as ‘good’ RE for her class and her own personal worldview. I contend that the relationship between teachers’ personal worldviews and the potential impact of that on their choice of SCK in RE is a key area for investigation.

What constitutes Teachers’ professional knowledge?

The power of defining knowledge has been identified as an imposition by powerful institutions (Foucault, 1977 and Freire, 1988). Foucault concludes that universal truth claims are, as Vanhoozer (2003, 11) summarises, ‘simply masks for ideology and the will to power’. Within RE, in England, the influences of various powerful stakeholders are evident: governments through policy documents and inspection, faith and community groups through syllabus design, subject leads through curriculum and exam board choices, teachers through lesson planning and teaching. Each of these choices are impacted by personal worldviews on what SCK is deemed worthy of, or necessary to, study.

Teaching requires a wealth of professional knowledge including, but not exclusively, pedagogic knowledge (of teaching methods and classroom management strategies, PK), pedagogic content knowledge (knowledge of how to teach specific learners in specific contexts, PCK) and subject content knowledge (Shulman, 1986; Freathy et al, 2014).

Other researchers have cited Shulman’s list but with modifications or evident bias. For example, Herman et al (2008) cite Shulman’s list but make no reference to knowledge of self as a teacher, which may reflect their focus on technology rather than psychology, but seems to neglect a clear possible area of influence. Shulman himself warns against the trivialisation of teaching in ignoring the complexities and demands of the profession

and presented the list as a minimum for all that teacher knowledge includes and not as a complete check list for teacher training programs.

In a basic library search of the 184,595 articles and books which referred to the term ‘teachers’ knowledge’, between 2000 and 2019, only 27,028 refer to ‘self’. These include ‘self-regulated learning’, ‘self-efficacy’ and ‘self-assessment’, only 406 refer to self and RE in England with only 7 articles referencing the actual terms ‘teachers’ knowledge’, ‘RE’ and ‘self’.

These articles included Freathy et al’s (2014) investigation into professional knowledge of RE teachers through a systematic methodological approach with journals, articles, textbooks and reports. Their comparative study between Germany and the UK faces challenges of differentials not only due to dissimilar teacher training practices but additionally between multi-faith and denominational approaches to RE teaching. Their primary concern was the history of the professionalization of RE teachers in the two contexts: one of the dimensions of professionalism that they identified was a familiarity with a professional body of knowledge:

The self-reflective nature of being a professional makes it likely that knowledge about the processes of, and factors influencing, professionalization could form a useful part of the body of knowledge required by RE professionals (Freathy et al., 2014, 226).

Freathy et al subdivide professional knowledge into five categories, reminiscent of Shulman’s (1986) comprehensive list: Subject-specific content knowledge, Knowledge

of subject-specific pedagogical methods, Orientative knowledge, Generic pedagogical and psychological knowledge, Professional identity, role and responsibilities (Freathy et al, 2014, 229). Their initial case study usefully charts the developments in both countries in each of these professional knowledge areas (Freathy et al, 2014, 233) which, perhaps unsurprisingly, mirrors the history of religion and the development of educational theories within each country. Their compartmentalisation of knowledge contributes to the discussion on necessary knowledge for an RE teacher and acknowledges the influence of self, primarily in terms of professional identity.

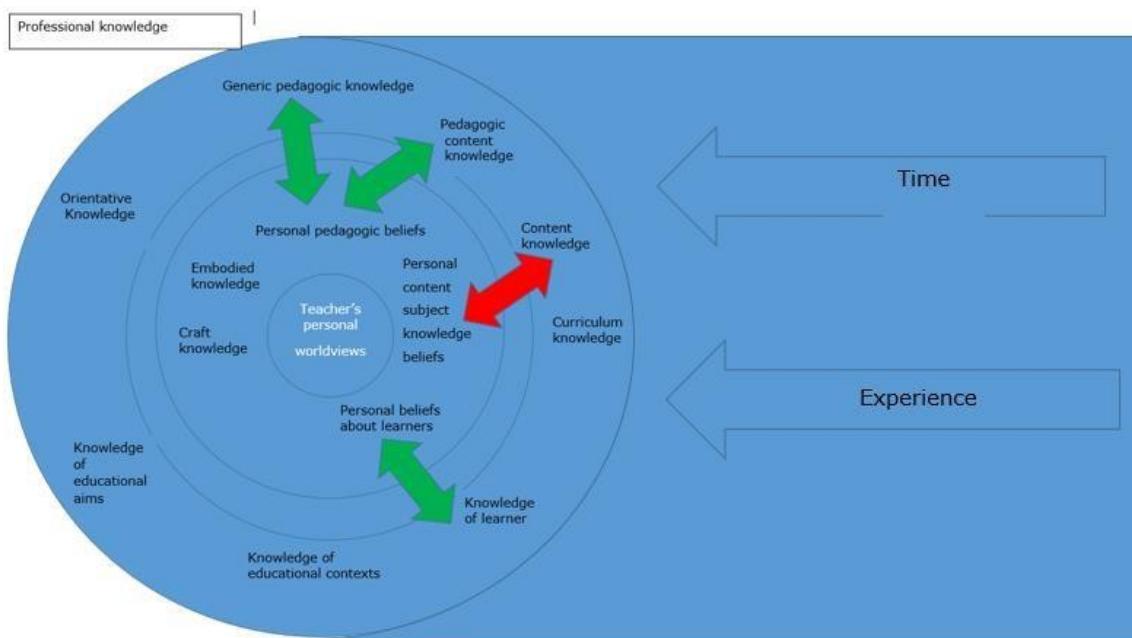
Why focus on SCK?

In the current climate of calls for a knowledge based curriculum (Kueh, 2018) incorporating ‘powerful knowledge’ (Young, 2008) and Ofsted’s focus on ‘knowledge rich schools’ which have led schools to draw up ‘knowledge organisers’ (Brunskill and Enser, 2019), the impact of teachers’ personal worldviews on their definition of SCK for RE is a timely area to examine. Recommending ‘a knowledge-based curriculum that focuses upon the intrinsic value of that knowledge’ (Kueh, 2018, 56) appears to be a noble call but one that seems to overlook the power dynamics at play in this very statement. Who defines SCK or decides the value of that SCK is unspecified. The value-ladenness of knowledge (similar to Hanson’s ‘theory-ladenness’, 1958) is evident. Questions arise as to whether teachers’ knowledge may actually be strongly held belief in their own worldviews (Kagan, 1992) rather than a codified body of knowledge.

If SCK may be value-laden, then an examination of these values may be beneficial to RE teaching. Self-examination may enable RE teachers to trace influences of their own

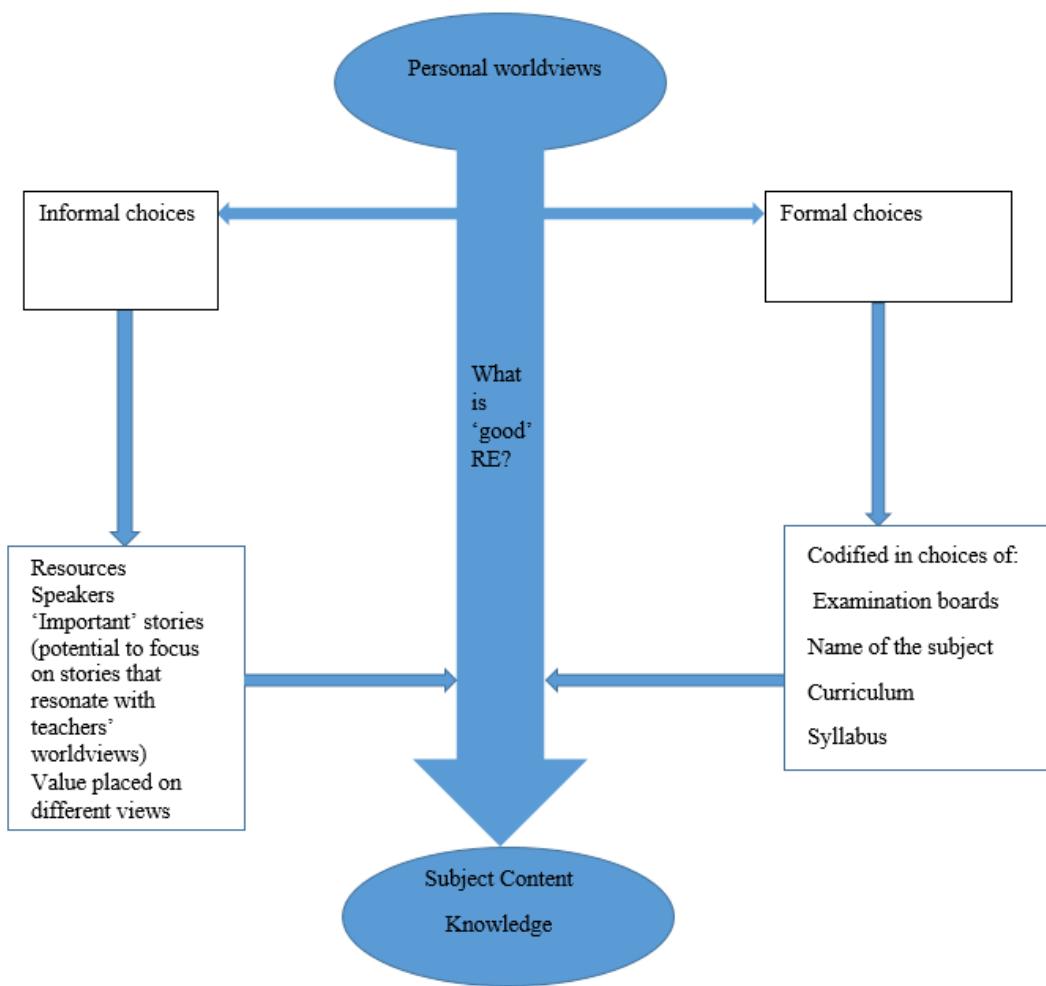
personal worldviews on their views of SCK. Figure 1 highlights the potential relationality between teachers' personal worldviews and their professional knowledge. Inspired by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (after Berk, 2000) this acknowledges recognised explicit areas of professional knowledge on the outer ring and more implicit personal aspects of professional knowledge towards the centre of the figure. This figure incorporates a chronosystem: allowing for the impact of life experience over time on the professional knowledge of the teacher and their personal worldviews. The green arrows signify existing bodies of research covering the interaction between these areas of professional knowledge. The red arrow signifies the focus of this article.

Figure 1. The potential interrelationship between teachers' personal worldviews and professional knowledge (author's own).



As already cited, research into teachers' personal beliefs about leaners and knowledge of the learner exists (Myhill and Jones, 2006, Stewart and Payne, 2008, Lavy and Sand, 2015 and Munar, et al, 2017). However, less exists into the impact of teachers' beliefs

concerning SCK, which is particularly pertinent in RE as the subject has no clear definition or set of parameters that are nationally agreed in England. Impact of personal worldviews may be on a formal or informal level. Teachers have some freedom to decide which content to teach – what content is valuable/good in their eyes. Figure 2 demonstrates the formalised level as SACREs, examination boards, school subject leads and teachers chose and design syllabi, curriculum content, chose a name for the subject and general programmes of study. Individualised informal levels occur as teachers often have freedom within that to choose what they wish to teach, particularly in primary schools. For example, in the Devon Agreed syllabus one section covers celebrations and stories recommending teachers teach stories that are ‘important’ to each faith, ‘What different kinds of writing and story are important to religions and beliefs?’, but leaves room for personal choice as to which stories are ‘important’ (Devon County Council, 2014, 12). Teachers may well choose stories that resonate with their own personal worldviews, thus seeming ‘important’, and may neglect those which they see as less valuable or ‘important’.



Implementing a Ricoeurian lens to examine the relationality between teachers' worldviews and SCK.

The relationality of self and text/life experience proposed by Ricoeur in his hermeneutical and philosophical writings on narrative (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985 and 1988) may assist in providing a theoretical basis for this relationality. Ricoeur develops Heidegger's (1927) hermeneutical circle into a never ending hermeneutical spiral (Ricoeur, 1984, 72). What is significant for this work is Ricoeur's process of distanciation and his three fold stage of mimesis: prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. The initial prefiguration stage refers to semantic understanding, from

individuals' preconceived beliefs and experiences (Dowling, 2011, 15): the preconceived ideas that an individual brings to a text/life experience. Distanciation is a process by which readers identify and attempt to leave to one side their own preconceived ideas to create an emotional or mental distance between themselves and the text/experience. Readers attain self-understanding by appropriating the work, which they can do through the distanciating effect of writing that has divorced the work from the author's intention (Simms, 2002, 41).

The danger of self-examination merely reinforcing bias is addressed directly by Ricoeur's work: The somewhat limited two dimensional pictures of self, often produced by self-reflection or discourse, may be replaced with a three dimensional evolving spiral of self-revelation. Thus implying that individuals can develop greater self-understanding through the reading of their life story³. In which case this is an ideal theoretical and methodological partner for this article.

However, adapting hermeneutical techniques and approaches onto a more anthropological study requires caution. Literary text is controlled by the author, or at least in birth⁴, and creative imagination provides an opportunity for a plethora of experiences which may be inaccessible or inadvisable in life. Questions exist in terms of Ricoeur's leap from metaphor to narrative and the implementation of literary hermeneutical skills onto life (Vanhoozer, 1990). Yet, the concept of distanciation, which Ricoeur proposes for hermeneutics, applies equally well to text as to life narrative.

The concept of distanciation is the dialectical counterpart of the notion of belonging, in the sense that we belong to a historical tradition through relation of distance which oscillates between remoteness and proximity. To interpret is to render near what is far (temporally, geographically, culturally and spiritually) (Ricoeur, 1981, 71).

To acknowledge the historic, geographic, temporal, cultural and spiritual influences on self may therefore enable individuals to see themselves in greater depth. To adopt this critical approach, although never total, may enable individuals to reach a greater depth of self-understanding.

Ricoeur notes the human dialectic between free will and necessity, between choice of action (voluntary) and being subject to things beyond the individual's control (involuntary). The dialectic develops in the negotiation between the two. However, worldviews may limit choice as cultural norms and societal expectations may prove too dominant for individuals to reject. Thus this is not involuntary as choice may well be dictated to or restricted by culture, consciously or unconsciously. Lowe points out that many choices are made by predetermined assumptions or values.

Our very sense of the world is governed by unexamined assumptions, compulsive tendencies to pigeonhole of which we are often unaware (Lowe, 1986, xiv). These assumptions may lead to pigeonholing and restrictions on choices and therefore limit personal freedom, possibly unconsciously. Individuals may well discover themselves to be making choices within a predetermined set of values and beliefs: to be 'someone dwelling within a structure of values and beliefs that necessarily entail judgment' (Dowling, 2011, 12). For individuals to gain the ability to distance themselves critically from their traditions or accepted modes of reasoning and behaviour

facilitates deeper understanding of their worldviews. Ricoeur views the goal of life to be to lead a good life: ‘Our ethical aim is, according to Ricoeur, to make the story of our lives a good story’ (Simms, 2002, 1).

The prefiguration and distanciation stages of the hermeneutic spiral may provide a theoretical base for the link between individual’s worldviews and choices of SCK. Additionally, a focus on the individual’s definition of a ‘good life’ may prove informative. This definition, particularly whilst unrecognised, may well adversely affect their RE teaching where they may well face differing definitions of a ‘good’ life.

The benefits of worldview consciousness for teachers of RE

Developing teachers’ worldview consciousness, as already discussed, is beneficial for RE teachers in highlighting the relationality between personal worldviews and SCK and in challenging the myth of neutrality (Bryan and Revell, 2011). Yet additional benefits include: aiding greater ‘self-illumination’; countering bias; enhancing knowledge and critical thinking; enriching dialogue; and developing understanding of others. Therefore recognition of the influence of teachers’ personal worldviews may aid in attempts to improve the efficacy of RE teachers.

An example of the impact of personal worldviews on SCK

A proponent of substantive knowledge, Kueh (2018) critiques the focus of RE content on the ‘brighter’ side of religions concluding that ‘the various (and darker) facets of religion and belief need to be accounted for within a framework of understanding, just as much as the brighter ones’ (2018, 55). Yet, the challenge exists as to whether that is

a conscious decision to teach SCK that promotes community cohesion or a subconscious decision by teachers to teach RE that adheres to their own worldviews. This relates to the teacher's view of the purpose of RE, demonstrating the inextricable link between teachers' personal worldviews, of the purpose of RE, of what is valuable or 'good' to know, and RE teaching. To teach all SCK of religion(s) and non-religious worldviews is unachievable but even to teach a range of content – views on women, creation or homosexuality – may produce hostile responses from pupils, parents, communities, faith groups and governments. Indeed, the terms 'darker' and 'brighter', which Kueh employs, are themselves subjective ethical value judgments informed by individuals' personal worldviews. These ethical value judgements may well impact what teachers, schools, communities and SACREs deem worthy of being considered as 'good' SCK for RE (figure 2). The links are evident and therefore identification and ascertaining the impact of personal worldviews on teaching practice, particularly choices of SCK, may be beneficial and necessary for RE teachers.

Aiding greater self-illumination

There exists a real danger in RE of teachers teaching the aspects of religion(s) which adhere to their own sense of a 'good life', such as the golden rule, but ignoring aspects of religion(s) with which they disagree, such as the role of women or views on sexuality. Thus RE may become a watered down representation of the most palatable aspects of each religion rather than education about and from religions. To understand one's own worldview, including definition of a good life, may help teachers guard against this and may preserve the subject of RE.

Countering bias

Prejudice and bias may form due to life experiences or community narratives and become a part of individuals' personal worldviews, and may, like worldviews, be unconsciously held.

A worldview is a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or unconsciously) about the basic make-up of the world (Sire, 1988, 17).

The unconscious nature of worldviews can surface in response to perceived threats: challenges to the individual's own values, norms, beliefs, views of knowledge etc. The implicit may only become explicit under duress or challenge. Research in ethno-political studies discovered the link between perceived challenges to deeply held views and conflict:

The more deeply felt these perceptions are, the more they will be linked to the very survival of the group and the more intense will be the conflict that they can potentially generate (Weller and Wolff, 2005, 6).

RE teachers may face teaching aspects of religious and non-religious worldviews that challenge their own values, norms, beliefs. These may produce negative responses in the teachers themselves which may well impact their teaching of that worldview, what they view as valuable in their choice of SCK. Without recognition of their own worldview this may negatively impact their RE teaching.

Enhancing knowledge and critical thinking

To examine worldviews, teachers need to wrestle with philosophical questions of life which can enhance their own teaching and learning. Valk notes the importance of this for pupils, but this is equally important for teachers:

Education is enhanced when the big questions are discussed and when students reflect upon and articulate their own worldviews as they reflect upon and examine those of others (Valk, 2009, 74).

How can teachers be expected to facilitate pupils to engage in this way if they have not themselves reflected upon their own worldviews? This reflection entails a deeper examination of the lives of others moving beyond merely identifying different clothes or food to critiquing differing worldviews in a non-judgmental, safe environment. This can aid teachers, instead of celebrating bland diversity, to champion ‘a resistant hybridity, an originality in each child’ (Davies, 2006, 5) or in each religious or non-religious worldview to be studied.

Enriching dialogue and understanding of others

As teachers’ *worldview consciousness* is developed, this may provide them with a system, or scaffold, from which to read the worldviews of others. For example, in Korean culture pupils are taught to avoid eye contact in conversations as a mark of respect, which for teachers in English schools could be seen as disrespectful (McIntyre, 1992; Kelly et al, 2010). Communication may be hampered by different worldview’s approaches to demonstrating respect, which may lead to confusion and frustration for teachers and pupils. In this case the values and beliefs are similar but the behaviour to express those is not only different but actually clashes. How much more will this occur when the beliefs, values and behaviour are different too? Communication between

students and teachers is crucial and the role of differing worldviews in this process is significant. Therefore *worldview consciousness*, understanding the role and nature of worldviews, enables communication between teachers and pupils to be more effective and facilitate learning.

The need for and challenges of worldview consciousness

The key role of worldviews in education has been noted by the CoRE final report (2018, 3) which states that ‘it is impossible fully to understand the world without understanding worldviews – both religious and non-religious’. As people live in close proximity but have very differing worldviews, possibly vastly divergent, this may lead to miscommunication, or even conflicts, arising. This is not merely due to different values but rather that their worldviews may be incomparable. The key is not simply that people disagree but that their ‘paradigms are incongruent’ (Vroom, 2006, x) so their different valuations of rationality and criteria are the issue. Therefore I propose that in order to teach RE, to teach about another worldview, an individual must first become *worldview conscious*, understand and identify their own worldviews – their own valuation of rationality.

Worldview consciousness may potentially positively impact RE in enabling teachers to understand the impact their worldviews may be having on their RE teaching: the value they place, the way they teach, the curriculum choices they make and their enthusiasm for RE. In understanding the process of worldview evolution teachers may be able to better understand the evolution of worldviews which may stand in conflict to their own.

To enable teachers to become *worldview conscious* presents philosophical and methodological challenges: the multifaceted nature of the term, designing effective tools and making what is held subconsciously conscious. The multifaceted nature of worldviews creates a practicability challenge. Additionally, individuals' worldviews have strong ties to societally accepted norms, thus to differentiate out beliefs from societal norms can be problematic. Examples of this can be seen in the changing role of women in the Church of England, corresponding to changing societal roles for women in England, the wearing of the Burkha amongst Muslim women despite lack of mention in the Qu'ran, and the challenge of the 2010 Equalities Act where religion and gender are protected characteristics yet these now clash: societal norms in England towards LGBTQ+ have changed but for many religious beliefs have not.

Challenges of identification arise in that as worldviews may be held consciously and subconsciously it is precisely the unconscious nature of worldviews that may elude adequate identification and definition. This unconscious nature of their own worldviews is what teachers may need to make conscious in order to enable them to beware of the potential impact of these on their SCK in RE.

Assistance can be located in Valk (2009)'s framework tool for worldview identification. Yet, whilst helpful for identifying a range of worldviews, this appears as a static model lacking the dynamic aspect of worldviews: continual evolution responding to changing individual and community life narratives. Ricoeur's (1984, 85, 88) work on narrative provides a depth and dynamism to understanding the process of worldview formation and evolution. The further stages of the hermeneutical spiral, configuration and refiguration, identify a process by which life events impact and transform individuals.

Ricoeur's work provides philosophical insight into the relationship between life events, the dynamic fluid nature of worldviews and the impact of this on future life choices. This may facilitate a more in depth understanding of the relationship between the teachers' experiences, the possible impact on their worldviews and the possible ways in which this may impact their choice of SCK.

Conclusion

Teachers' professional knowledge may be classified in a wealth of different categories (Schulman, 1987, Freathy et al, 2014) but the interrelationship between teachers' personal worldviews and their SCK needs greater consideration. Research on teachers' personal worldviews about learners including ethnicity (Stewart and Payne, 2008, Lavy and Sands, 2015), gender (Myhill and Jones, 2006) and socioeconomic background (Auwarter and Aruguete, 2008) proved illuminating for teachers and teacher educators. Conducting research into the interrelationship between teachers' personal worldviews and SCK may prove equally as beneficial for future practice. The value-ladenness of RE is evident in teachers' decisions on SCK. Without redress RE may become a watered down representation of the most palatable aspects of each religion(s) rather than education about and from religion(s). To understand the interrelationship between teachers' personal worldviews and SCK, while implementing a Ricoeurian lens, may guard against this and may preserve the subject of RE.

Notes

1. Alternative approaches include Human development (Grimmit, 1987), ‘Concept cracking’ (Cooling and Marsden, 1995), Critical realism (Wright, 2007), and Enquiry (Erricker, 2011).
2. Van der Kooij et al (2013) challenge the debate on definitions of worldviews and examine elements of worldviews in an attempt to find consensus to form ‘organised’ worldviews (2013:214). They propose four elements: existential questions and beliefs, influences of worldviews on thinking and acting, moral values and meaning giving in life. These four elements seem oblivious to the fact that influence of a worldview is hardly an element of a worldview but an outworking or product of a worldview. Moral values of a ‘good life’ also surely stem from the answers to the existential questions? Meaning giving in life seems naturally to flow on from the answers to those significant existential questions.
3. Descartes (1644) claimed that individuals could reach an epistemological neutral stance by, in their search for truth, employing ‘hyperbolic doubt’ to clear away their previously held beliefs in their search for truth. Yet, rather than counter my argument that neutrality is a myth, this confirms the need for individuals, with religious or non-religious worldviews, to actively engage with a process of self-examination to counter their bias and preconceived ideas. Descartes undertakes a process, “to set aside all the opinions which I had previously accepted” (p. 177), which is exactly the process I would recommend teachers undertake. This is similar to the process of methodological agnosticism (Smart, 1968) in comparative religious studies which attempts to lay aside any ontological commitments regarding the truth claims of religious beliefs. The difference here is that Ricoeur’s theoretical and methodological approach undertakes this challenge through the examination of life narrative.
4. Barthes (1968) and deconstructionists called for consideration of the concept of intertextuality to include the role of reader response in textual interpretation and not simply authors’ intentions.

Figure 3. Elements of teachers' personal worldviews relating to RE (Author's own)

	Dimension	sub dimensions	Examples
Teachers personal worldviews relating to	Self	As a teacher	Ability to teach new subject knowledge, find information and deal with questions.
		As an RE teacher	Challenge stereotypes of RE teachers (Sikes and Everington, 2003, 2004)
		Self-efficacy	Lack of confidence in ability to understand religious and non-religious worldviews. (Wintersgill, 2004)
		Neutrality/faith influence	Aim to prevent own faith impacting RE teaching and view of self as neutral if identify as having no faith (Bryan and Revell, 2011).
	Others	Pupils	Assumptions of abilities and/or knowledge if pupils belong to a specific community ethnic/faith group. Mantel of the expert?
		Teachers	View other teachers, with a faith, positively as an expert and potential resource or negatively assuming inability to be impartial.
		Parents	View that well educated people need no religion therefore negative assumptions about those from faith communities.
		Other faith communities	Possible misconception that faith and culture are inextricably linked therefore to critique one is to critique the other.
	Subject	Purpose	View RE's main role to develop tolerance and respect and therefore teach aspects of faith that are congruent.
		Value	Deem RE an unimportant subject therefore leave for HLTA to teach or teach with limited preparation time.
		Content	Inextricably linked to worldviews on purpose and value of RE, pedagogy and normative assumptions of faith for self and others.
		Cross-curricular links	Potential contradictions between science and RE may prove problematic for some teachers. History/Geography links may support an ethnographic view.
	Pedagogy	Faith nurture	Faith schools and teachers teaching their own faith (Groome, 1991)
		Phenomenology	Religions' doctrines and values are phenomena which can be studied (Smart, 1968)
		Interpretive ethnographic	Studying faith communities and comparing with own worldviews (Jackson, 1997)
		Human development	Learning about and learning from other religions (Grimmit, 1987)
		Concept cracking	Examining a belief and connecting it to an aspect of pupils' experience (Cooling and Marsden, 1995)
		Critical realism	Challenging teachers and learners to realism about religions and belief together with a critical, enquiring stance about them (Wright, 2007)
		Enquiry	Employing enquiry skills to enable pupils to interpret religions (Erricker et al, 2011)
		Dialogic approach	Enabling pupils and teachers to investigate the significance and effectiveness of different methodologies of enquiry in RE (Freathy et al, 2015)

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