

Elton-Chalcraft, Sally ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3064-7249> (2019)
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Can (and should) Religion and Worldviews encourage young people to challenge Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc, or is RE morphing into a knowledge rich academic subject to impress Russell group universities?

AULRE 8th May 2019
Prof Sally Elton-Chalcraft

Is RE morphing into religious studies, in an attempt to compete more effectively with other academic subjects, to qualify for Russell group approval or to become more 'objective'?

Is Religion and Worldviews in danger of diluting its ability to encourage young people to reflect on, and respond to personal attitudes towards their own and other worldviews?

While acknowledging that a more academically rigorous and knowledge rich RE curriculum is important,

this paper raises concerns about the ability of the CoRE National Plan for RE to consider issues of social justice which, to varying degrees of success RE currently endeavours to investigate.

The National entitlement seems to concentrate more on in depth knowledge and a teacher's ability to correct misconceptions and less on culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2018) and equipping young people with the skills to recognise diverse perspectives and challenge social injustice.

The paper considers Religion and Worldviews in the context of the governmental Prevent policy to 'promote British values' which, it has been argued, is a politicalisation of the curriculum (Elton-Chalcraft et al 2017).

The paper considers how both primary and secondary student teachers can be invited to meet the challenges of teaching Islam in the context of Prevent which some have argued results in an 'othering' of Muslims and positions them as 'a suspect community' (Breen-Smyth 2014; Pearce and Lewis 2018, Panjwani et al 2017).

The paper unpacks a variety of stances towards Muslims as a suspect community using a typology, devised by the author, which intersects governmental and security forces perspectives, through to trusting Muslim and non Muslim viewpoints, towards suspected terrorists, 'bad' and 'good' Muslims.

These varying stances towards 'Muslims as a suspect community' have implications for teachers of Religion and Worldviews. This paper seeks to engage in the debate concerning how Islam can be discussed in schools – as an objective study of a diverse religion and/or as an opportunity to explore, and challenge Islamophobia.

The guidelines – emphasis on robust RS knowledge and understanding

6. Worldview responses to meaning and purpose -

The different roles played by worldviews



Exploring Diversity and Achievement – Multicultural and Anti-racist approaches

Tokenism – “Saris, steel drums and samosas” -
superficial

Multicultural RE- eg learning *about* and *from*
Islam (visits, visitors- valuing Muslim religion
and Asian culture) KS1 and KS2 – **deeper
learning**

Anti racist approach- eg B.Brown *Combating
discrimination* – teasing Jeetinder (Sikh
Persona Doll) KS1 and KS2 – **changing
attitudes**

Anti-Racist approaches

Combating Discrimination – eg Babette Brown's work Persona Dolls

Use of Jeetinder – Sikh Persona doll -Reception to year 3 &4 being teased about top knot (see Multiverse website religious diversity strand

Prejudices are nurtured from an early age eg Brown *Unlearning Discrimination in the Early Years*

Aims- Changing attitudes, critical engagement

Is there space for Anti racist RE



Persona Dolls

– learning about

- the traditional belief system of Sikhs
- Individual patterns of belief

Exploring

- Bullying
- Adopting an anti racist stance

Context – Prevent and promoting British values

- A politicisation of the curriculum : one voice

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Teaching about Islam

Factual knowledge

Othering

Anti racism



Muslims as a suspect community

Teaching about Islam with an awareness of how Muslims are perceived from a variety of viewpoints

Teachers engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay 2018)

	Perceived as a terrorist (extremist)	Perceived as a potential terrorist ('bad' Muslim)	Perceived as harmless ('good' Muslim)
Suspicious Security forces and government	1 Incarceration Total surveillance Absolute suspicion Shamima Begum (Times)	4 Highly suspicious Prevent, anti-radicalisation training Control orders surveillance Hamida (Abbas)	7 Considered non-threatening and considered useful to 'win hearts and minds' of entire suspect community . But even these 'good' Muslims are 'at risk' of radicalisation
Fearful Non-Muslims And Muslims	2 Surveillance High suspicion but feel uncomfortable Shamima	5 Family and friends suspicious and keen to enact de radicalisation Hamida	8. A 'good' Muslim – not religiously extreme, fits into society. Being Muslim is only one aspect of identity
Trusting Non-Muslims And Muslims	3 Aware of devastating effects on families of radicalised terrorists Shamima	6 Considers suspicion as ill founded. Aware that counter terrorism initiatives can be counter productive	9. No suspicion Complete Trust Muslim identity respected. Disappointed that Muslim identity is sometimes sidelined (religion blindness)

Implications for RE teacher education – ITE and CPD

- Are teachers aware of the politicisation of the curriculum?
- Do we want teachers to be aware? Benefits / dangers
- Do we want teachers to be culturally responsive practitioners?
- Do the proposed guidelines provide opportunities for teachers to engage their learners in anti racist debates?
- Should teachers engage learners in anti racist debates? Could this be counter productive ? Is there a chilling effect?
- What are the implications for initial teacher education and continuing professional development of including / omitting anti racist stances in the proposed guidelines?

Parting thoughts.....what do we want young people to DO with the subject knowledge

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

The only sure way to avoid mistakes is to have no ideas.

A. Einstein

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Elton-Chalcraft, S., Lander, V., Revell, L., Warner, D. and Whitworth (2017) To promote or not to promote Fundamental British Values? Teachers' standards, diversity and teacher education *British Educational Research Journal* Volume 43, no 1 pgs. 29-48 Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/berj.2017.43.issue-1/issuetoc> (Accessed: 17.10.17).

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