

# The RE Problem: Bad for the Jews?

Shira Batya Lewin Solomons  
Jewish Community of Berkshire JCoB.org  
Shira@JCoB.org



Limmud Festival, December 2024

## Introduction

Proposition: **Religious Education most important thing to fight antisemitism.**

For the past nine years, I have devoted my professional life to RE Judaism provision.

Problem: **Integrity of RE is under threat.** Complex problem.

Related to postmodernism and a movement to *problematise* the concept of religion.

### Questions:

From a cross-cultural perspective:

What is religion?

Can we understand the religions of others?

How do we teach religions of other people?

What is the purpose of Religious Education for in the UK?

#### 1. Learning About Religion:

- Cultural literacy (Christian civilisation)
- Social cohesion / cross-cultural literacy / learning to understand people who are different

#### 2. Learning From Religion

- Insight into what it means to be human
- Personal development / moral education (midot)
- Philosophical training / critical thinking / truth seeking / ethics

What place does nonreligion play in this?

Search for a broader category that include both religion and nonreligion, as a school subject for children.

## Jewish Perspective:

We want people to understand what it means to be Jewish in the UK

While avoiding stereotypes

But focusing on what Jews have in common so that

- (1) they have a coherent understanding and
- (2) they can empathise with Jews they meet in their adult lives

Real problem of teaching content that is not fit for purpose. Historically and now.

## Postmodernism

Affects almost all areas of academia and culture

Pedagogical approaches:

- **What to think** versus **How to think**.
- **Substantive knowledge** vs **disciplinary knowledge / skills**
- Need both in balance.

Deconstructivism: Questions **whether there is a \*what\* that you can think**.

Religion, sex, childhood etc. are social constructs that are shaped by power structures.

Progressive idea to deconstruct these categories to gain freedom, shake off power.  
“**Problematise**” “**narratives**”

Deconstructivism often has a point.

Problem is what happens afterwards. Power vacuum.

Certain categories are necessary to communicate, to understand the world.  
We need a shared concept of religion to share and learn about each other’s religions.

Narratives / concepts get reconstructed. **Who** gets to do that?

**Who controls that narrative?**

## The Problem of RE in the UK:

Post modern critique – deconstruction of religion

**Power grab** to replace it. Religion and Worldviews framework for RE.

**Casualties will be small communities** (such as Jews Hindus Sikhs) who cannot control the new narrative.

If we allow other people to construct the narratives about us, other people will not learn about who we are *authentically*.

# Berkshire Syllabus Experience

## SACRE – Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education:

- Responsible for syllabus – reviewed every five years
- I am the Jewish rep on Wokingham. Husband on Reading and West Berks
- Six councils in Berkshire have a joint syllabus
- Problems with new syllabus, complaints by reps in all six SACREs.

## Four Groups of each SACRE must agree a syllabus (by consensus)

- Group A: Faith reps (not Anglicans)
- Group B: Anglicans
- Group C: Teachers
- Group D: local politicians
- **RE Advisors** employed to act as experts to write the syllabus

## Syllabus changes: How we got here

Previous syllabi had been very belief-heavy, which did not suit Judaism.

2018-2023 Syllabus : **Believing / Behaving /Belonging.** Worked reasonably well.

2025-2030 Syllabus: New “Religion and Worldviews” framework.

“A worldview is a person’s way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes **how a person understands the nature of reality** and their own place in the world.”

**Religions treated as “organised worldviews.”**

**Worldview = view = belief (??)**

## Problems with New Syllabus:

1. Focus on propositional belief:
  - a. People assumed to be motivated by belief that x is true
  - b. Neglect of group identity / belonging (as opposed to individual)
  - c. No mention of faith as faith
2. Lack of adequate consultation with minority faiths by RE Advisors.  
**“Trust the experts”** (RE Advisors)
3. Activities **encouraged judgments about beliefs / practices**  
Teachers instructed that children should learn to justify beliefs with arguments.

Fundamental Rule of RE:

**We are never trying to work out who is (more) correct!**

## Examples (these were amended in the final version):

UKS2: What do **believers** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts? (Th)

KS1: What is the story of Jesus and how do Christians remember him?

Who is remembered by Jewish people (Jews) and why? [story of Abraham]

KS3: Is there a God and does it matter?

Consider different types of evidence (e.g., physical evidence, reasoning / logic).

## Year 5

### 12.1.5 Year 5

#### WHY DO SOME PEOPLE CHOOSE TO FOLLOW A RELIGION AND OTHERS DO NOT?

This unit should be used at the beginning of the academic year and should take about 2 hours or 2 lessons.

While the unit is core, the activities and questions below are a suggested way of delivering the material. Use them as a starting point to build a unit that suits your cohort and teaching style.

Lesson 1: to identify and evaluate different reasons for believing or belonging.

#### Engage:

Start with a human bar chart activity around a **particular belief** (choose something appropriate for your class that will have varied responses). This does not need to be a religious belief. Follow this with a discussion about why they hold that belief – is it from their family or community? Is it because they have evidence? How does believing this make them feel or act? Why might they hold a different belief about this to that held by others in the class?

Broaden this out to discuss some religious ideas such as:

- Do they follow a religion?
- Why / why not?
- Is it because it is useful?

#### Enquire and Explore:

Conduct a survey around the school to find out how many adults and **pupils follow a religious belief?** Pupils need to consider what questions they will ask and then analyse the data. Are all the year groups the same? Do people's ideas change as they get older?

Use the census data from 2021 to explore religion in the local area. How does that compare to the school? What might make that different? (A church school may have a different demographic to a community school for example). Which set of data is more reliable?

Gather the list of reasons that people give for following a religion. Pupils may need to ask a wider range of people. Invite some members of the local faith communities to answer the questions about why they believe or not. Include non-religious/humanists in this. Has everyone even thought about that question? Is the answer 'because I do' sufficient?

#### Respond and Communicate:

**Rank/sort the reasons for believing or not and explain why they think some of these reasons are better than others.**

Lesson 2: To identify that the choice to believe or not is complex, and the range of factors that influence it.

Engage:
Watch the film Nobody Stands Nowhere (Theos on YouTube). As they watch, make a list of the different ideas that are presented for belief. Do they know where they stand and why? Think about a place that is special to them and what they do there: the traditions and rituals, the people they see, what they learn, what to do to get ready. How does that influence what else they do? Why do they go there? Do you go because the people are similar to you? – e.g., youth groups, children’s activities or something else? (This will revise issues from Y3 and Y4)
Enquire and Explore:
Watch one of the Real People, Real Faith videos (NATRE website) – (KS2 does believing in religion make a difference in your daily life?) Look at a faith not planning to study. <u>Are all the impacts on daily life that they mention positive?</u>
Are the rules communities set an attraction or off-putting? Is it OK to question an authority in a place of worship or disagree/disobey? Are the rules important? Does this lead to people changing their minds about what they believe? There are many people who don’t have a good experience of religion. <u>Are religions always benevolent?</u> What might an organised religion need to do to attract people? Do they need to be more supportive? Have more activities for specific age groups?
Respond and communicate:
Pupils could write a short piece explaining <u>why people choose to follow a religion or not and what the benefits or disadvantages might be.</u>

## Year 6:

Lesson 2: What do different people believe happens when you die? Does anyone really know the answer?

Engage:
Hold a class discussion about what is likely to happen to a person when they die. Gather a wide range of ideas and <u>rank them according to which the pupils feel is the most likely.</u>



## Practical response:

1. Organised meetings of Jews and Hindus to formulate responses
2. Meeting with the RE advisors and the Jews and Hindus
3. Syllabus was somewhat improved BUT

## Final syllabus: Judaism content changed without consultation

- KS1: excessive focus on Abraham at expense of patriarchs and matriarchs leading to the Children of Israel. Explicitly against the request of Jewish reps.
- **Deleted the word Israel or Children of Israel**
- UKS2:
  - Changed key questions to emphasise difference between movements when we wanted to emphasise what we had in common.
  - **Removed the word “Jews” or “Jew”** from key questions.
  - Removed the word “Israel” from the content recommendations.

### **Final Syllabus UKS2 Key Questions**

**ISLAM – IN Y5 or Y6** (unless focusing on Judaism)

**(choose from)**

What do **Muslims** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and traditions?

What might it mean to be **a Muslim** in **different parts of the world**?

What influences the way **Muslims** respond to local and global issues of social justice?

**JUDAISM - IN Y5 or Y6** (unless focusing on Islam)

**(choose from)**

What is the role of **Jewish** sacred texts and tradition?

What might it mean to be **Jewish** in **different branches of Judaism**?

What influences the way **Jewish** people respond to local and global issues of social justice?

**SIKHI – In Y5 or Y6** (unless focusing on Hindu dharma or Buddhism)

**(choose from)**

What do **Sikhs** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts?

What might it look like to live as **a Sikh** in **different parts of the world**?

What influences the way **Sikhs** respond to local and global issues of social justice?

- Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists all can be mentioned. But not Jews. Explicitly against the request of the Jewish reps.
- **Obsession with differences between “movements” and with “social justice”**

We asked for these questions instead:

- What do Jews learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and traditions?
- What does it mean to live a Jewish life and how does this vary among different Jewish communities?

**Where did this come from?**

**What is happening elsewhere in the UK?**

Not a fringe syllabus: **One of RE advisors now in a senior position in the RE Council**  
**RE Council currently producing a suggested syllabus (for across the UK).**

Problem syllabus elements came from the **Religion and Worldviews** approach.

## Worldviews Framework:

### What is it? Where did it come from and why?

#### Background

##### World Religions Paradigm

- Modernist paradigm to each religion at universities
- Treated religions as self-contained, sometimes stagnant, belief systems
- Focus on (1) historical background: founding individual  
(2) doctrines or beliefs

##### Decolonising RE (Postmodern Critique / Deconstruction of “Religion”)

- World Religions approach is very reductive
- Not really authentic. Religions always framed in Christian terms.
- Religions cannot be understood out of relation to each other
- approved religions viewed as essentially all being the same
  - different paths to the same (Christian) TRUTH
- Ignored **diversity of lived experience**
  - “authoritative” voices selected to suit a Christian narrative of the religion
  - Other voices ignored / sidelined
- “Religion” as a **colonialist** concept imposed on other cultures
- **ISMS**: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism... colonialist concepts
- Deconstruction / **decolonisation of Religion and also of religions**
- In the mix: Outsider / insider problem **positionality**
  - Can we ever really understand the lived experience of someone else?

[Podcast with James Cox](#)

## Two simultaneous movements:

1. Religious people using religious terminology for nonreligious movements.  
Is Humanism a religion? More recently: Is gender identity ideology a religion?
2. Nonreligious academics dominate religious studies departments at universities.  
Seek to create **a new concept to encompass both religion and quasi-religious secular movements** such as Humanism.

## Ninian Smart: Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs. 1983

### Do not try to define religion.

Observe *phenomena*.

*Phenomenological* method

Avoid *interpretations* or narratives since these always come from biases.

**Seven “*dimensions*” of religion** into which our observations can be organised.  
(originally six dimensions)

Broader *category*: **worldviews**, that includes both religion and secular ideologies

### Nobody stands nowhere.

Avoid narratives / become aware of your own narratives, positionality,

**“structured empathy”**

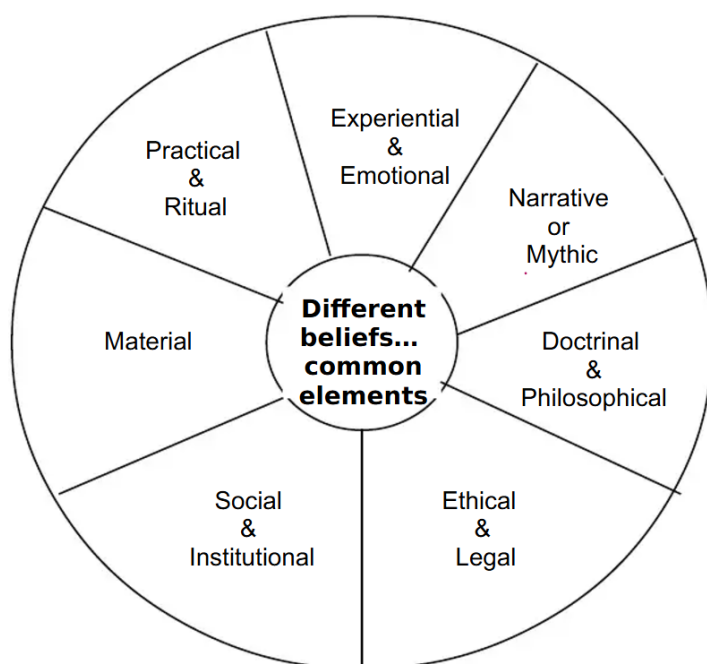
Stop *understanding* other religions in relation to Christianity (which is “superior”).

“neutral, **dispassionate** study of different religions and secular systems – ... worldview analysis.... treating the world’s religions on their own terms” (p. 16)

“The study of religions and secular worldviews – what I have termed “worldview analysis” – tries to depict the history and **nature of the beliefs and symbols** which form a deep part of the structure of human consciousness and society.” [full quote](#)

“The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: **the systems of belief** which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings.”

On scholars within religions: **“They are themselves part of the data.** Thus, though the **Pope** is the authority for Catholics, others may know more about religions, including Christianity, than he does. For example, **it is my job, as a religious scholar, to understand religion; it is his, as a religious leader, to be religion.**” (p. 4)



## What are worldviews?

2018 CORE report (RE Council):

A **worldview** is a person's way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes **how a person understands the nature of reality and their own place in the world**. A person's worldview is likely to influence and be influenced by their beliefs, values, behaviours, experiences, identities and commitments.

We use the term '**institutional worldview**' to describe organised **worldviews shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions**. These include what we describe as religions as well as non-religious worldviews such as Humanism, Secularism or Atheism.

We use the term '**personal worldview**' for an **individual's own way of understanding and living in the world**, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional worldviews

**PROBLEM: religions = worldviews = views = beliefs**

What about those seven dimensions of religion?

SOLUTION: Divide the definition into two.

(2024 RE Council Handbook)

A person's **personal worldview** describes and shapes how they encounter interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview, including the **beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions** that influence and shape their thinking and living.

An **organised worldview** can be understood as a 'more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) **sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas**' (from van der Kooij et al. 2013).

**PROBLEM:**

**Worldview** now means more than one thing at once. No definition of worldview.

*Are teachers expected to understand that organised worldviews are not views?*

Most RE teachers have very little subject knowledge!

**In practice, worldview is really being understood to mean view of the world.**

# How is RE actually taught with Religion and Worldviews?

## 1. Shift away from traditional RE

- a. See [2023 National Content Standard](#). **How to think** not what to think.
- b. RE becomes **academic inquiry** to understand “how worldviews work”.
- c. Learning sociological methods such as conducting surveys to obtain data on religious populations.
- d. **Gradualist** approach to introducing worldviews
- e. Some RE materials are still excellent. BUT Inconsistency. Framework is vague. No clear definition of “organised worldviews”
- f. Creates **opportunities for people to hijack the curriculum** (politics)

### Lesson:

- Yes religions do influence each other. Yes diversity within traditions.
- Yes useful to see religion as multidimensional.
- Deconstructing “religion” may be necessary BUT **Need to reconstruct** an alternative definition to avoid a power vacuum

## 2. Shift of focus to the “personal worldview”

- a. No clear framework for teaching organised worldviews coherently.
- b. [Smalley \(2023\)](#): “a shift in the aim of the subject from being to teach children about religions, to now being to help them develop their own beliefs”
- c. [Cooling \(2024\)](#) purpose of RE: develop the student’s personal worldview
- d. Use of **critical RE**. asking children to judge / justify beliefs ([see above](#))
- e. Study of religions primarily in order to answer big questions

Example: KS3 Worldviews framework in [Surrey Syllabus](#)

Example: new [Barnett syllabus](#) based on the “Six Big Questions” of Ann Taves. See also [podcast](#) and [RE Online article](#)



### 3. Obsession with diversity within religions

- a. Emphasis on “lived experience”

Religious communities treated as collections of individuals with their own “lived experience” – many Jewish worldviews – no such thing as “Judaism”

Smalley (2023): Shift “from reified, self-determined interpretations of religious traditions” to “an examination of the lived reality of people.”

“**subject is better viewed as afternoon tea...** RE therefore becomes a series of dialogic encounters with various sweet and savoury treats (religions and non-religious philosophies)”

- b. Marginalisation of expert voices from within religion (recall Ninian Smart)

- c. Example: Investigating Jewish Worldviews

looking at various accounts from Jews on texts that inspire them.

Goal: investigate “Jewish worldviews” on “living a good life”

- d. **Neglect of teaching that gives a coherent understanding** of what adherents have in common. Effect on minor religions where teaching time is limited.

- e. Reality that when Jews work together, **we agree about what Judaism is** (as taught to non-Jews), and what variations need to be explained to avoid stereotyping.

- f. Ironically, listing differences between orthodox, and progressive “branches of Judaism” is itself reductive. Movements treated as discrete, self-contained.... Orthodox are stereotyped.

### 4. Religions being used to teach external priorities

- a. Example: Investigating Jewish Worldviews:

Of 32 pages, 6 on vegetarianism / animal welfare, 2 on Messiah  
Kashrut and ban on hunting mentioned but not shechita

Messiah section leaves out ingathering of exiles and was based largely on advice from Alanna Vincent a signatory of the “Jerusalem Declaration” (!)

- b. **Political topics:** “climate justice” “environmental crisis” “antiracist RE”

Even if these are valid causes, someone is choosing values and projecting them onto religions. Much like World Religions!

Would it be more instructive to look at how religions deal with the tension between taking care of our neighbour and love for humanity?

That we may end up loving mankind but no one in particular?

- c. 2024 RE Council Handbook (Stephen Pett): “communities’ aspirations for representation, even advocacy, must be in the service of the curriculum subject, rather than the curriculum serving the communities” (Idea is from Ninian Smart)

## 5. Narratives still exist, but their existence is denied.

- a. Those with the **loudest voice push their preferred narratives** and capitalise on the incoherence of the framework.
- b. Values education that does not always restrict itself to explicitly agreed consensus values, with **political discourse** (anti-racism, environmental emergency, etc.); or that projects a certain version of these values onto everyone without acknowledging this has happened.
- c. Example: [resource](#) on religion as a source for peace or war: Islamic apologetics avoiding any difficult issues such as what is a just war.
- d. **Looking at a person's development as an individual journey of discovery is itself expressing a worldview.**

Traditional religions are about what binds people together.  
We are not just individuals with a common viewpoint.

## 6. Authority still exists, but selectively

- a. Myth that focus on lived experience avoids hierarchy of knowledge.  
Some people's "lived experience" is more equal than others'  
How to prevent selection of "lived experience" or "experts" that fit a desired narrative?
- b. "Trust the experts" (RE Advisors) but not authorities within minority faiths
- c. Who gets to decide what values should be taught? Politics invading RE.

## Lessons:

- Much truth to the critique of "World Religions Paradigm", BUT
  - **We need concepts of religion and of religions**  
or we cannot understand others or be understood as cohesive traditions.
- Believing / behaving / belonging approach already addressed problems of reductive "world religions paradigm"
- Irony that we seem to have come **back full circle**:
  - a founding individual was brought back in against our wishes
  - our "worldviews" syllabus obsessed with propositional belief
  - lived experience of Jews is ignored by the "experts" (RE Advisors)

**Judaism is being recolonised in the name of decolonisation!**

## Conclusion

- How do we teach about religions to each other? Is it possible?
- Yes, but we cannot do this without (1) narratives (2) authority.
- Who controls the narrative? Who has authority?
- **We must control the narrative about us. We are the authority.**
- How do we avoid being colonised?
- Religious people can be experts on religion. Myth of outsider objectivity.
- Deconstructing without reconstructing just empowers opportunists.
- **If people are to understand us, there must be an “us” to understand.**
- A broader multidimensional definition of religion is possible.  
Key features: connectedness (*Dveikus*) and faith / loyalty (*Emunah*)
- What binds people to each other within a religious / faith tradition is *not* always a common worldview.  
**Viewing religions as worldviews is recolonisation.**
- **Jews need to campaign for authentic teaching about Judaism.**
- **We must not be afraid to assert ourselves.**

# Appendices

## [Ninian Smart: Worldviews \(quotes\)](#)

p. 1: “...human beings do things for the most part because it pays them to do so, or because they fear to do otherwise, or because they believe in doing them. The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: the systems of belief which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings.” [[back](#)]

p. 2: “The study of religions and secular worldviews – what I have termed “worldview analysis” – tries to depict the history and nature of the beliefs and symbols which form a deep part of the structure of human consciousness and society.” [[back](#)]

P. 4: “People thus often think of the religious expert – Billy Graham, Pope John Paul II, the Dalai Lama, a seminary professor, a learned rabbi – as a spokesperson for a particular faith. And that is fine if what is wanted is an expression of faith or opinion starting from the particular tradition to which the spokesperson belongs. But such persons are part of the traditions for which they speak: they are part of what the modern student of religion seeks to understand. They are themselves part of the data. Thus, though the Pope is the authority for Catholics, others may know more about religions, including Christianity, than he does. For example, it is my job, as a religious scholar, to understand religion; it is his, as a religious leader, to *be* religion.” [[back](#)]

From Ninian Smart: *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*. 1983

## [Berkshire Syllabus 2025-2030 \(Links\)](#)

Initial version (that asked students to rank beliefs for how reasonable they were) available from

<https://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/documents/s199166/Pan-Berks%20Syllabus%20-%20Full%20v10%20DRAFT%20v28.pdf>

Response of Berkshire Judaism Representatives in July 2024:

<https://docs.jcob.org/RE/Judaismresponse18July2024.pdf>

Final version (that removed the word “Israel” available from

<https://wsh.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/schoolshub/files/2024-11/Pan-Berks%20Syllabus%20-%20Final%20draft.pdf>

Response of Berkshire Judaism Representatives in October 2024:

<https://docs.jcob.org/RE/JudaismfeedbackOctober2024.pdf>

# NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARD FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND (RE Council 2023)

## **Purpose of study** [\[back\]](#)

An education in religion and worldviews should:

- introduce pupils to the rich diversity of religion and non-religion, locally and globally, as a key part of [understanding how the world works and what it means to be human](#)
- stimulate pupils' curiosity about, and interest in, this diversity of worldviews, both religious and non-religious
- expand upon [how worldviews work](#), and how different worldviews, religious and non-religious, influence individuals, communities and society
- develop pupils' awareness that learning about worldviews involves interpreting the significance and meaning of information they study
- develop pupils' appreciation of the [complexity of worldviews](#), and sensitivity to the [problems of religious language](#) and experience
- induct pupils into the processes and [scholarly methods by which we can study](#) religion, religious and non-religious worldviews
- enable pupils, by the end of their studies, to identify positions and presuppositions of different academic disciplines and their implications for understanding
- give pupils opportunities to explore the relationship between religious worldviews and literature, culture and the arts
- include pupils in the enterprise of [interrogating the sources of their own developing worldviews](#) and how they may benefit from exploring the rich and complex heritage of humanity
- provide opportunities for pupils to [reflect on the relationship between their personal worldviews and the content studied](#), equipping them to develop their own informed responses in the light of their learning.

### **Issues:**

This is cited verbatim in most new syllabi.

Not included: Attaining a good understanding of the major religions in modern day Britain and the communities who practice them.

Not included: Learning respect for religious practices and views other than one's own.

Focus on disciplinary skills, disciplinary knowledge – **How to think not What to think**

Opaque language pointing to postmodern critique. Religion is a “problem” Not defined.

See also [RE Council Worldviews FAQs](#)

These are in statutory guidance, but

**What if this framework becomes the new statutory guidance?**

## Personal Worldview and Critical RE

### Smalley (2023):

“paradigm shift” “a shift in the aim of the subject from being to teach children about religions, to now being to help them develop their own beliefs” [[back](#)]

### Developing the personal worldview of students Cooling (2024):

“Pupils should therefore learn that claims to knowledge are interpretive judgements influenced by our personal worldview and critical appraisal is required to test their validity. The educational goal is then that pupils learn how to make informed, reflective, scholarly and reasoned judgements as to truth such that they are prepared for adult life in a world where there is much diversity and controversy around questions of truth between the many religious and non-religious traditions.”

### How do students make judgments as to truth? (Trevor Cooling)

Trevor Cooling suggests the solution is **Critical Religious Education**

#### Concept cracking.

“The **key skill is enabling students to become critical evaluators of truth claims from the competing world religions.** They have to make decisions about which of these truth claims, if any, they believe to be true. This is arguing against the post-modern and relativistic world view of 'all beliefs are equally valid'”

#### Knowledge in a religion and worldviews approach in English schools

“Pupils should therefore learn that claims to knowledge are interpretive judgements influenced by our personal worldview and critical appraisal is required to test their validity. The **educational goal is then that pupils learn how to make informed, reflective, scholarly and reasoned judgements as to truth** such that they are prepared for adult life in a world where there is much diversity and controversy around questions of truth between the many religious and non-religious traditions.” (p. 6)

### RE Today Curriculum example:

## KS3: How can people express the spiritual?

Author:

RE Today Advisers

£15.00

The investigation implements **the principal aim of RE** which is to engage students in systematic enquiry into significant human questions which religion and worldviews address, so that they can develop the understanding and skills needed to appreciate and appraise varied responses to these questions, as well as develop responses of their own.

Part of a series. Also see:

- [KS3: Does religion help people to be good?](#)
- [KS2: Does it make sense to believe in God?](#)
- [KS3: Is religion a power for peace or a cause of conflict?](#)

- Andrew Wright: [Critical Realism](#) (Critical Religious Education)

We need to take seriously the truth claims of others. There is a truth out there. The vast majority of religious people, the vast majority of atheists are saying: this is the way the world actually is. This is ultimately how reality is structured. **Not enough for RE to just teach us how to live together harmoniously. It needs to address the issue of truth.**

Cited by [NATRE](#)

Wright [argues](#) (skip to 11:46) that it is colonialism to insist that RE students are tolerant of the beliefs of others. [[back](#)]

## [Lived Experience](#)

[[back](#)]

### [Smalley \*Journal of Religious Education\* \(2023\) 71:213–224](#)

“Therefore, given that total knowledge of all major world faiths is an impossible undertaking, shifting the emphasis of study from reified, self-determined interpretations of religious traditions to one which gives cumulatively sufficient understanding of the relationship between the teachings and doctrines of organised worldviews and the beliefs, practice and experience of adherents through an examination of the lived reality of people potentially offers a way to ensure relevance and rigour for the subject”

“I have wondered ... whether the **subject is better viewed as afternoon tea**, rather than a single pie. This shift of metaphor captures much of **what Cooling** (2020, 2022) **have been trying to describe as a paradigm shift**, as the Worldviews approach moves the subject away from the problematic World religions paradigm, which is prone to become overcrowded and presents reified, positivist versions of selected world faiths. To understand what an afternoon tea is, one doesn’t have to repeatedly consume all of the elements. But **having had several opportunities to try out the various cakes and sandwiches, one comes to understand what an afternoon tea is.....** RE therefore becomes a series of dialogic encounters with various sweet and savoury treats (religions and non-religious philosophies)—via different ways of knowing—to build up knowledge of individual expressions of these, but aiming to understand what it means to ‘inhabit a worldview’, about the existential nature of different ways of being, about what it means to be human.”