THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND EDUCATION OFFICE

Key principles of a balanced curriculum in RE

Summary

There is now a general consensus that the purpose of RE is about religious literacy. In relation to this we are defining this more specifically as:

> Helping children and young people hold balanced and well-informed conversations about religion and belief.

In order to fulfil this purpose we are advocating that RE needs to provide a balance between three disciplines. These are:

- Theology
- Philosophy
- Human/Social Sciences

We envisage this is a means of structuring an RE curriculum in primary and secondary education that enables teachers to fulfil the stated purpose, i.e. to produce pupils who are religiously literate. This structure will provide the architectural plan within which a range of RE content, pedagogies and resources can develop religiously literate pupils.

Theology

This is about believing. It looks at where beliefs come from, how they have changed over time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they relate to each other.

Theology involves investigating key texts and traditions within different religions and belief systems, exploring the ways in which they have been used as authoritative for believers and the ways in which they have been challenged, interpreted and disregarded over time. It considers the use of reason in assessing the key ideas of a religion or belief system (thus crossing over with philosophy in places), as well as exploring the significance of experience on the claims made by religious and non-religious people. Theology enables children and young people to grapple with questions that have been raised by religions and beliefs over the centuries. Thus, we argue that everyone can have something to say about these ideas and concepts and that all can be theologians.[1]

[1] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, *Subject Benchmark Statement: Theology and Religious Studies* (Gloucester: QAA, 2014).

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Philosophy

This is about thinking. It is about finding out how and whether things make sense. It deals with questions of morality and ethics. It takes seriously the nature of reality, knowledge and existence.

For many thousands of years, human beings have asked questions about meaning and existence. Around the 6th Century BCE these questions began to be systematized in religious philosophies in different areas of the world. This is the starting point for the discipline of philosophy. It is this process of reasoning that lies at the heart of philosophy. Philosophy is less about coming up with answers to difficult questions and more about the process of how we try to answer them. It uses dialogue, discussion and debate to refine the way in which we think about the world and our place in it. Philosophy contains three fields of enquiry that would be applicable to a balanced framework for RE these are metaphysics, logic and moral philosophy. Metaphysics considers the nature of the world around us, logic investigates our process of reasoning (the way we think about ourselves and the world around us) and moral philosophy considers the nature of good and evil.

Human/social sciences

This is about living. It explores the diverse ways in which people practise their beliefs. It engages with the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies.

Engaging with the methodologies of the human/social sciences will help students investigate the ways in which religions, beliefs and religious believers have shaped and continue to shape societies around the world. They can promote better understanding of the ways in which religions and beliefs influence people's understanding of power, gender, compassion, and so on. The methodology includes listening to the voices and observing the practice of members of faith and belief communities. Considering both the strengths and weaknesses of religions and beliefs in their lived reality is a crucial element of helping pupils hold the balanced and informed conversations we hope for. It also enables pupils to consider the nature of religion itself and the diverse ways in which people understand the term 'religion'.

A balanced curriculum, is like a three-legged stool

Conversations are often best had sitting down! Particularly the hard ones…! A three legged stool provides a useful analogy.

The easiest way to create balance is to have a three-legged chair or stool. Three legs provide a stable equilibrium because mathematically three points determine a plane. Holding the three disciplines in balance is key. One should not dominate the other.

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