

How can Religious Education promote creativity in the primary school?

XXXXXXXXXX

BA (Hons) in Primary Education with QTS

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

April 2015



Frontispiece

This is to certify that, except where specific reference is made, the work described in this research project is the result of the investigation carried out by the student, and that neither this research project nor any part of it has been presented, or is currently being submitted in candidature of any award other than in part for the degree of BA (Hons) in Primary Education with QTS of Trinity Saint David University of Wales. I understand that any work I use without reference constitutes as plagiarism, which will lead to the failure of this module.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to take this opportunity to gratefully thank the staff and pupils from the school involved in this research project for their assistance and valuable contribution. With special mention to the teacher and RE co-ordinator interviewed for their time, patience and valuable information. Thank you to the head teacher of this school for allowing access for the author to interview the staff and pupils during their final teaching practice.

The author would also like to thank all those who kindly responded to the electronic questionnaire; their responses have made a large contribution to this project.

Finally, special thanks go to Dr. Geraint Davies and Sioned Hughes of University of Wales Trinity Saint David for their help and constant support throughout the development of this research project.

The author cannot thank everybody enough for their help.

Contents

Contents	Page No:
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature review	2
2.1. Historical developments	2
2.2. Teaching RE creatively	3
2.3. What is creativity?	4
2.4. How schools currently promote creativity in RE	5
2.5. Teaching RE creatively through YCC	7
2.6. Conclusion	8
Chapter 3: Methodology and research design	9
Chapter 4: Results and discussion	11
4.1. The aim of the chapter	11
4.2. Response to question one	11
4.3. Response to question two	11
4.4. Response to question three	12
4.5. Response to question four	14
4.6. Response to question five	15
4.7. Response to question seven	16
4.8. Response to question eight	17
4.9. Limitations of the research	17
Chapter 5: Conclusion	18
Reference List	20
Bibliography	22

List of Appendices:

Appendix:	Page No:
Appendix 1 - A copy of the distributed questionnaire	24
Appendix 2 - Response to question one	27
Appendix 3 - Response to question two	28
Appendix 4 - Response to question three	30
Appendix 5 - Response to question four	33
Appendix 6 - Response to question five	36
Appendix 7 - Response to question six	39
Appendix 8 - Response to question seven	42
Appendix 9 - Response to question eight	44
Appendix 10 - Interview with the primary school teacher	47
Appendix 11 - Interview with the RE co-ordinator	51
Appendix 12 - Children's opinions of RE and the "wedding"	56
Appendix 13 - Photographs of the "wedding"	58
Appendix 14 - OfSTED Case Study: P4C and RE	60
Appendix 15 - An RE Policy.	64
End of research project	70

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this research project is to discover how Religious Education (RE) can be taught creatively in primary schools. The changing demographics of Britain today show that in the last decade, there has been an 82% increase in Wales' foreign-born population (Migration Observatory, 2014). With this in mind, it can be argued it is the role of educators to educate young people on the different cultures and religions to help promote community cohesion. To support this, the Welsh National Curriculum places an emphasis on developing children's sense of belonging, value and respect for their country as well as developing a knowledge, understanding and respect for cultures and traditions that not only reflect their local community, but from those around the world (WAG, 2009).

It is of the author's opinion that in some schools RE is not promoted as creatively as it could be. It is hoped the research gathered from this study will aid the author's passion for knowledge and understanding of multi-faiths in order to become an outstanding, creative practitioner in this ever changing multi-cultural society.

In order to satisfy the question, the author will interview an RE co-ordinator, practitioner and pupils to investigate how they explore creativity in RE. In addition to this, the author will electronically distribute a questionnaire in order to gather opinions from a wider range of practitioners. The questionnaire can be viewed in appendix one and photographs of a creative lesson in appendix thirteen will demonstrate creativity in this subject.

One of the purposes of this project is to help the reader understand why RE is a relevant subject in what can be seen by some as an over-subscribed curriculum. It also hopes to provide some ideas to help practitioners teach the subject in a creative, exciting way to bring the subject to life. The research gathered hopes to aid the author, and readers, to become a superior practitioner of RE and to appreciate the full potential of the subject.

To summarise, the aim of this project is to:

- Understand how RE is currently being taught creatively in primary schools
- Understand the challenges faced by teachers regarding teaching RE creatively
- Gather advice from experienced practitioners to improve RE lessons for those who lack the confidence to teach creatively.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

With the introduction of the Literacy Numeracy Framework in 2013 and the strong focus on national testing, it can be argued that RE can be easily relegated in a curriculum groaning under the weight of other priorities (Revell, 2005). Some may struggle to view RE as an academic subject and fail to understand the relevance and some may simply lack the confidence to present non-biased RE due to insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject (Webster, 2010). However, as this research hopes to show, RE plays a pivotal role in how a child develops and begins to understand the world around them (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

Within such a diverse multi-cultural Britain, RE is of vital importance. We are in a society where religious issues can be seen as a source of controversy, particularly following world events such as 9/11, coupled with often negative media attention. Ergo, it can be argued that one of the main priorities of RE is to develop an in depth understanding of religion in order for learners to make thoughtful, yet intelligent, opinions, based upon knowledge and understanding, as opposed to ignorance, prejudice or media misconceptions (Watson and Thompson, 2007).

OfSTED (2013:2) perceives RE as potentially playing “a key role in promoting social cohesion and the virtues of respect and empathy.” Since September 2007, schools have had a statutory duty to promote community cohesion in order for schools to engage with local communities to help break down barriers and celebrate the diversity of cultures (CFBT, 2011). It can be argued that competent teaching of RE can boost community cohesion by developing an appreciation for diverse cultures and challenging racist and discriminative behaviour (DCSF, 2010). By extension, the Welsh curriculum has placed an emphasis on developing a knowledge, understanding and respect for cultures and traditions that not only reflect their local community, but from those around the world (WAG, 2009).

Historical Developments

It is interesting to note the historical developments of the subject. RE not only became a compulsory part of the curriculum in the 1944 Education Act, but it was also renamed Religious Instruction and collective worship. Moreover, parents were given the option of withdrawing their children from this subject, if they desired (Bastide, 1999).

By the 1980's, it was agreed that Local Education Authorities (LEA) in England and Wales were to produce their own locally agreed syllabus for RE. Following this Act, Religious

Instruction was renamed Religious Education. The 1988 Education Reform Act not only required schools to reflect the fact religious teachings in the UK are in the main Christian, but also required them to develop a knowledge and understanding of the principle religions represented in the UK; this led to some degree of controversy (Webster, 2010). As well as being required to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, two new attainment targets to develop a learner's awareness of the meaning of religion were introduced:

1. Learning **from** religion
2. Learning **about** religion (Grigg & Hughes, 2013).

Interestingly, these were initially intended to be seen as pedagogical approaches, not attainment targets. However, today, despite their extensive use, it is reported, largely through OfSTED reports, that many teachers are still confused how to implement them (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

In 1988, the Education Reform Act required the LEA to create a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) in order to offer advice on matters relating to the teaching of RE, in agreement with their locally agreed syllabus (Grigg & Hughes, 2013). Furthermore, the SACRE also has the power to make the LEA review its agreed syllabus and consider variations in the legal requirement for the act of worship (Bastide, 1999).

In recent times, RE has evolved to encourage personal reflection and help children make sense of their own lives in addition to listening to others and learning respect and tolerance of others. Although practitioners are still encouraged to educate learners about the six main faith groups, there is a concern that the guidance provided through the locally agreed syllabus is insufficient. Erricker et al. (2011) noticed different interpretations of the syllabuses; some follow an objective, intellectual and critical approach to RE, whereas others pursue a more positive view of religion (Webster, 2010).

Teaching RE creatively

OfSTED (2013) noted that in 60% of primary schools visited, the achievement and teaching of RE was not good enough. It was reportedly due to practitioners' insufficient subject knowledge and understanding and a confusion as to the purpose of RE. The results of which led to missed opportunities suggesting that, although there have been some improvements with regards to teaching RE in the last ten years, many still do not realise the full potential of the subject. This is further supported by Watson and Thompson (2007) who argues the fundamental factor of effective teaching is dependent on the teacher. For this

reason, the commitment of any teacher is a crucial one. Some people assume that religious people make better teachers of RE, as opposed to atheists or agnostic people. However, this is not always the case; Watson and Thompson (2007) report cases of some excellent agnostic RE teachers. An example of this would be one who prepares learners to make their own life choices in an informed, yet critical way in order to help make the world a better place. Practitioners must also prepare learners for adulthood, employment and life-long learning (Grigg & Hughes, 2013).

Many schools have been exploring ways of providing more flexible, creative ways of teaching RE to make the subject more enjoyable, meaningful and exciting (DCSF, 2010). In order to do this, the Non-Statutory Framework for RE suggests teachers provide the scope and creativity to enhance the teaching and learning opportunities for RE (DfES, 2004:3).

What is creativity?

“Creative teaching is an art. One cannot teach teachers didactically how to be creative; there is no fail safe recipe of routines. Some strategies may help to promote creative thinking, but teachers need to develop a full repertoire of skills which they can adapt to different situations” (Joubert 2001:21).

Conversely, commonly held misconceptions of creativity need to be addressed; the thought that creativity is only connected to the arts and/or confined to gifted and talented individuals, is unfounded (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

Research advocates RE is effortlessly placed to support creativity as it can be seen as subjective, supporting the expression of an individual's personal opinion (Webster, 2010). Creativity has always been spectacularly tough to define. Some, including the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), regard it as an abstract noun; creativity is an “Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value,” (NACCCE, 1999:30). This report suggests that we are all, or can be, creative to a lesser or greater extent if we are provided with appropriate opportunities. The NACCCE (1999:30) breaks down creativity into four fundamental characteristics:

1. Thinking or behaving **imaginatively**
2. The imaginative activity must be **purposeful**
3. The activity must generate something **original**
4. The outcome must be of **value**.

Others may regard creativity as a verb in terms of creative thinking, for example, de Bono's Thinking Hats. The rest may divide creativity into strands:

- Creative thinking
- Teaching for creativity
- Creative integration of subjects (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

It can be suggested that when RE is taught creatively, it can help pupils explore the world in which they live by providing them with opportunities to engage with three significant questions; the 'What', the 'Why' and the 'So what?' These help pupils practice their enquiry skills, thinking skills and communication skills which help them appreciate how they, and others around them, fit into their society while developing a personal sense of identity and belonging (Webster, 2010). By extension, excellent creative RE lessons provide thought-provoking, challenging questions regarding the meaning and purpose of life, beliefs of God and moral issues of right and wrong. It enables pupils to think and talk creatively and philosophically when exploring the differing views of the world (QCA, date unknown).

Piaget argues the fundamental role of education is to produce creative people (Newton, 2012). 'Creativity: Find it, Promote it' also states creativity prepares pupils for life, encourages them to discover things independently, be open to new ideas and eager to explore ideas with their peers (QCA, 2004). This is supported by the Welsh curriculum which expresses the promotion of creativity as, "stimulating children's curiosity and imagination, raising self-esteem and encouraging confidence to try new things," (DCELLS, 2008a). When promoted effectively, creativity can help raise levels of achievement and the learning pace for all pupils (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

How schools currently promote creativity in RE

An excellent way of promoting creativity through RE is providing children with first hand experiences of religion. Three examples of how this can be implemented are:-

1) Religious artefacts

In order for children to think, learn and extend their knowledge, Piaget argues first-hand experiences are crucial as knowledge is established through hands on, practical opportunities (Pound, 2005). This could be applied to the use of handling religious artefacts in creative RE lessons as pupils can smell, touch and feel precious objects used in the daily lives of worshipers. Although most classrooms have some access to religious artefacts, the initial cost can be expensive (Bastide, 1999).

2) Visiting places of worship

Research shows that 90% of Key Stage 2 (KS2) children benefited from an educational visit and 94% of teachers agreed that visits were of vital importance to their teaching, therefore, this invaluable resource must not be underestimated (DCMS, 2004). This is supported by Constructivist John Dewey who advocates the significance of experiential learning stating pupils learn the most from first-hand experience. He argued pupils' learning should be based on real-life situations and should learn by doing (Pound, 2012). Therefore, taking pupils on an educational visit outside the classroom will immediately satisfy their natural curiosity making the experience more memorable.

Despite all the excellent benefits of educational visits to a place of worship, there are some limitations. Research suggests one of the considerable barriers is the practitioner's lack of subject knowledge (DCMS, 2004); nonetheless, in these situations representatives of the faith community are usually happy to assist with necessary information to make the trip as beneficial as possible (DCMS, 2004). Moreover, some parents may be uncomfortable with their child visiting a place of worship, therefore, practitioners must reassure them that the purpose of the trip is not to convert a child's religion, but shows how other people choose to live their lives.

3) Guest speakers

From experience, faith leaders and worshipers are always eager to share their practices with local schools. Religious parents are often an invaluable resource who often gets overlooked, but they can make an excellent contribution to the subject (Bastide, 1999). One of the limitations of such an experience depends on the speaker's ability to communicate well with young children. For the best chance of success, the speaker could be briefed beforehand with the purpose and expectations of the visit, while pupils can be supported with preparing suitable questions for the speaker (Davies, 2004). Preparing the children for the visit is just as important as preparing the visitor; if pupils are unprepared, the visitor's appearance, rituals and/or artefacts may provoke embarrassed laughter, sadly reinforcing negative stereotypes and failing to make the appropriate impact of encouraging respect and understanding for other cultures and religions. It is also important to note that arranging guest speakers is a time consuming activity, so it needs to be worthwhile with the aims and expectations set out from the start with exact details of how their visit contributes to their topic (Bastide, 1999).

OfSTED (2010) echoes the importance of making improved use of artefacts, visits and guest speakers and recommends that schools provide additional opportunities for pupils to deepen

their knowledge and understanding of the six major religions, particularly with regards to the core beliefs of Christianity. Excellent lessons observed showed that when these first hand experiences were utilised, pupils developed an animated interest in exploring the different religions and beliefs in further detail. This is also recognised within the Welsh curriculum, as it states, children must “gain insight into religion, religious people and religious aspects of life” and “investigate and express meaning (including religious meaning) through signs, symbols, artefacts and imagery,” (DCELLS, 2008b). Naturally, all these elements contribute to community cohesion and help gain a respect for other cultures and religious traditions.

The national curriculum in Wales also details three core skills for pupils to develop throughout KS2.

1. Engaging with fundamental questions
2. Exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practice(s)
3. Expressing personal responses (DCELLS, 2011)

OfSTED (2013) stated that assessment of RE continued to be a weakness in primary schools as many teachers were unsure how to assess in a subject that involves spiritual development, beliefs and opinions. As with any subject, Assessment for Learning (AfL) techniques are vital to ascertain where the child is in their learning, where they need to go next and how best to get there. However, some aspects of RE are not assessable or measurable as lessons involve personal views, attitudes and/or emotions of learners (QCA Date unknown). There have been extensive debates over the years as some take the view above; that RE is a private matter and it would be morally wrong to assess their personal reflection. On the other hand, others argue assessment enables ‘teachers, governors and parents to know what is being achieved in RE,’ (Watson, 1993).

Teaching RE creatively through Curriculum Cymreig

Creative RE lessons relate well to all the key skills in the curriculum, however, they do tend to get overlooked by many teachers. Living in Wales, RE is particularly effective when taught with links to the Curriculum Cymreig (YCC). The Welsh curriculum (DCELLS, 2008c:8) recognises that,

“Religious Education contributes to the YCC by allowing learners to appreciate the significance, value and impact of the rich Christian heritage and dynamic multi-faith composition of Wales past and present. By using a range of stimulating resources from the locality learners are challenged to ask fundamental questions about meaning and the purpose of life and the significance and impact of religion and religious thinking on 21st century society. Such insights support social cohesion and cultural/religious awareness.”

Lastly, Lat Blaylock, Editor of RE Today, believes creative RE is better because:

1. Religions themselves are creative,
2. Teachers are at their best when they are being creative,
3. All pupils, in one way or another, are creative too and
4. RE seeks creative thinking (Blaylock, 2015)

To conclude, RE has to 'fight for its life' to stay afloat in an over-crowded curriculum. However, the value of RE must not be underestimated; creative RE lessons can help shape pupils to become confident, imaginative, reflective team players who can make a positive contribution to society (Webster, 2010).

If some children claim RE is boring, it could be because the lessons are too easy and lacks challenge. Creative teaching and learning must be challenging yet fun at the same time and as this research hopes to show, when taught creatively, RE can be an enlightening, thought-provoking, liberating subject for both learners and practitioners.

Chapter 3: Methodology

It was made clear to participants that for ethical reasons all data collected would be kept strictly confidential in association with the Data Protection Act 1998. The questionnaire remained confidential; only their job title and the number of years' experience they have been teaching was requested. Upon reflection, the questionnaire should have referred to the British Education Research Association (BERA). All data received will be used strictly for the author's personal professional development and be destroyed in July 2015.

Structured interviews were arranged with an excellent teacher of RE and an RE co-ordinator of a local school. It was important for the author to arrange such interviews as it allowed a greater scope for further questioning and the interviewee to elaborate further if prompted. However, the author is aware that when using this method, an interviewee could be misquoted. To avoid this, a transcript of the interview will be available to each interviewee for their approval before making public.

To benefit this research project, electronic questionnaires were emailed to RE co-ordinators and teachers. There was a response rate of 42% which is enough to harvest and analyse the information, but a higher response rate would have provided a much greater scope for interpretation. Consideration was given to the fact open questionnaires are arguably not the most reliable forms of qualitative research. It is difficult to ascertain how truthful a respondent has been, how much thought has been given to each answer and the inability to ask them to elaborate. Despite this, by posting questionnaires to different schools, the author could gather larger amounts of information from a number of different teachers in a number of different schools. For these reasons, questionnaires helped the author cast a wider net in terms of research so the benefits outweighed the disadvantages in this situation. Respondents were given two weeks to fill out the questionnaire which is considered an appropriate length of time.

In addition to the above, it was felt, arguably, the most important people should be interviewed; the children themselves. The aim of this is to establish what the children like or dislike about their RE lessons and what they would hope to do more of. One limitation of this is the younger children in the Foundation Phase (FP) may be unaware of what RE lessons are. In this situation they will be asked what they enjoyed the most about a specific creative RE lesson they have engaged in.

Lastly, due to the small-scale research, all of the participants were from the same county. This makes it an unbalanced sample, ergo; conclusions should be made with caution. If this research was to be replicated, a much wider sample of people should be used. Further structured interviews would have also greatly benefited this research project; however, disappointingly it was not possible due to time constraints.

Data obtained from questionnaires can be found from appendix two to nine.

The interview with the teacher of RE can be found in appendix ten.

The interview with the RE co-ordinator can be found in appendix eleven.

The interviews with the children can be found in appendix twelve.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to analyse and interpret the opinions received from practitioners of RE and RE co-ordinators relating to how they teach RE creatively. In addition to electronic questionnaires, an RE teacher and an RE co-ordinator were targeted as a way of collating quality and refined information during this project.

Note: 1 participant equates to 9.09% (11 participants in total), therefore, $1 \div 11 \times 100$.

The questionnaire comprised of eight key questions which were specifically devised to draw upon conclusions that related to the aims of this project. A conscious effort was made to ensure the questionnaire was emailed to teachers of RE and RE co-ordinators. 36% respondents were coordinators of RE and the remaining 63% were teachers. Respondents had between one year and twenty nine years teaching experience; the broad range of experience was welcomed in this survey. A copy of this questionnaire can be seen in appendix one.

Question One
What does creativity mean to you?

As discussed in chapter two, research claims creativity is subjective, therefore, question one focussed on participants' personal views on what creativity means to them. Appendix two contains a list of words that were mentioned. The most common being 'hands on,' 'imaginative,' and 'artistic'. The wide range of answers confirms that creativity means different things to different people. Interestingly, many of the responses received related to the NACCCE's (1999) four characteristics of creativity: imaginative, purposeful, originality and value.

Question Two
In your opinion, what should be the purpose of RE?

Unsurprisingly, 100% of practitioners believed one of the main purposes of RE was to develop an awareness of religions, beliefs, faiths and cultures from around the world. One RE co-ordinator stated, "*[The purpose of RE is] to stamp out stereotypes and racist*

behaviour and develop a respect for people from minority groups.” This was echoed by another, *“[The purpose is] to teach about the world religions in order to create harmony.”* All responses correlate with the argument from Watson and Thompson (2007) who think learners should be educated to form thoughtful, intelligent opinions of religions as opposed to media misconceptions or ignorance.

As well as teaching *from* and *about* religion, over 50% of participants felt the purpose of RE was to help children develop a sense of identity and belonging and develop life skills that prepare them for adult life and employment. One RE co-ordinator added, *“It teaches children life skills, the ability to question, explore different ideas and think/listen to other people’s point of view. It promotes discussion and the ability to reflect critically.”* Additionally, one of the fundamental ways of developing creative thinking is through dialogue, on condition that the environment allows pupils to feel safe enough to express themselves (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

For a full list of answers to question two, please see appendix three.

Question Three
How have you have taught RE creatively?

There was a vast variety of creative RE lessons which were inspirational and exciting to read. One practitioner made a life size priest out of cardboard in order to help children engage with the Catholic faith in an incredibly creative manner.

Additionally, an RE co-ordinator discussed how her class entered the ‘Spirited Arts’ competition, run by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) as a creative way of engaging learners through an element of healthy competition.

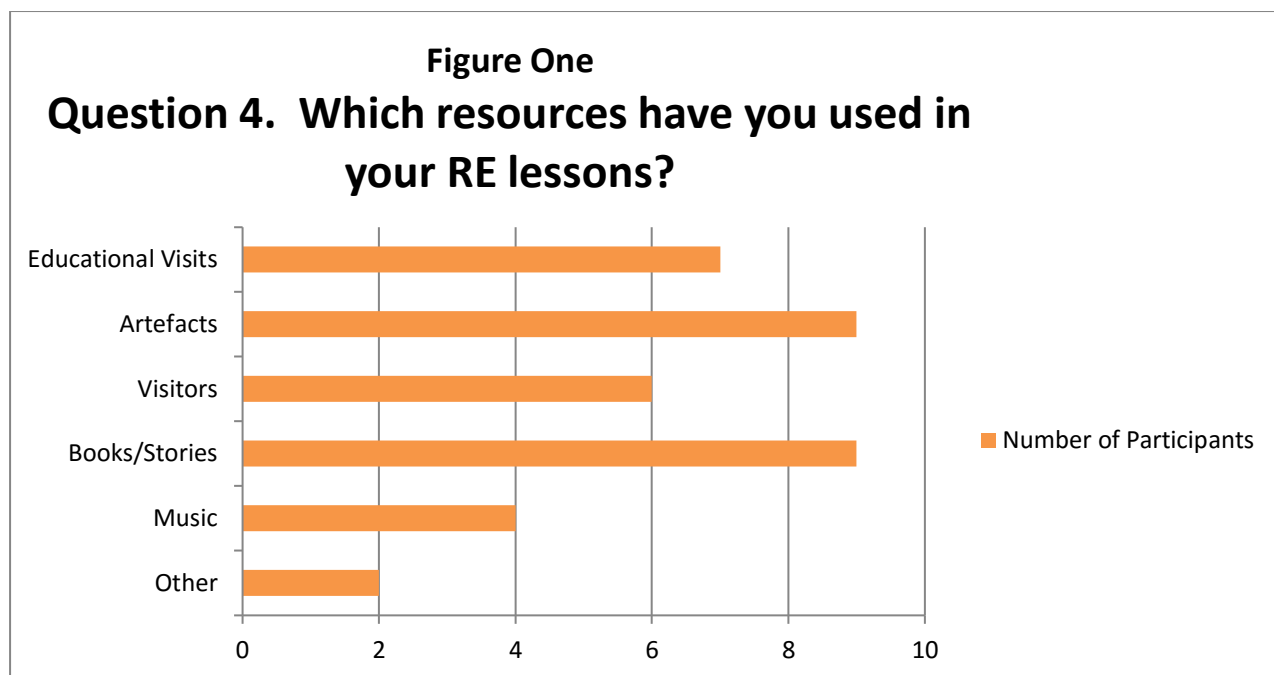
Likewise, 18% of respondents mentioned a fascinating use of the Comenius project where schools in the UK forge professional links with schools abroad. One practitioner added, *“It has been invaluable as the children make links with other cultures in other countries to their own.”* Another expanded on this, *“... it certainly helped us look at other religious cultures and traditions practiced in other countries and it meant more to the children to do it through the schools we have been linked with.”* Although there would be a cost to this, which some schools may find limiting, the fact it will benefit most areas of the curriculum suggests an excitingly innovative, yet creative way of teaching RE in a cross-curricular way.

Another interesting example was provided by an RE co-ordinator who explained the benefits of teaching RE creatively through Philosophy for Children (P4C). *“P4C has developed their thinking and questioning skills. With the children in KS2, it ends up with me as a facilitator of learning while children lead the discussions.”* There is a wide range of stimuli relating to RE which make it a natural context for P4C discussions. P4C thrives on learners sitting in a circle and thinking and talking together as a group. For this reason, P4C is commonly mistaken for circle time. The emphasis placed on the 4Cs of caring, critical, creative and collaborative learning also mean RE is a natural way of combining P4C and RE. It works because the learners work out meanings from stimuli themselves, meaning they engage better, rather than a teacher imparting their interpretation of it. Furthermore, when combined with higher order thinking skills, a deeper level of understanding is achieved (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015). An Ofsted case study relating to how an English school have integrated P4C into a religious context has been placed in appendix fourteen.

Lastly, another RE co-ordinator stated their school hosts an annual “International Week” to promote diversity in their multicultural school. They tried food from all around the world, had a fashion show with different styles of traditional dress and danced to a selection of multicultural music. The experience *“really brings the community together”* which will naturally help community cohesion. This approach will also satisfy recommendations from the Welsh Curriculum who state, schools must “develop a knowledge, understanding and respect for cultures and traditions that not only reflect their local community, but from those around the world (WAG, 2009).

For more information on all the examples cited above, including a list of further responses to this question, please see appendix four.

In addition to the wonderful responses as previously mentioned, valuable ways of teaching RE creatively were through educational visits, exploring artefacts and inviting guest speakers into school. This leads neatly onto the next question which asks participants to tick all the resources they have used to make their RE lessons more creative. The checklist was established following OfSTED’s (2010) recommendations for making greater use of artefacts, visits and guest speakers. Figure one displays the statistics for this question.



An overwhelming 82% of practitioners had used artefacts and/or books/stories in their RE lessons, compared with 36% of practitioners choosing to use music as a way of expressing RE. This could be interpreted as slightly disappointing as music can be an excellent outlet to explore RE creatively. One of the limitations of using questionnaires as a method of collecting data is the inability to probe participants further. Despite that, the follow up to question four did invite participants to elaborate.

A fantastic way of incorporating guest speakers into RE lessons, as told by one practitioner, is for the children to ‘interview’ the visitor in the style of a “This Morning” television interview. In preparation, the children did their background research and thought of suitable questions for the visitor. The full details on can be found in appendix five.

Persona dolls had also been used in an effective way to help introduce children to new faiths in an easy, non-threatening way, as noted by one respondent. This technique helps the children develop empathy for a character in a subtle way; it was also reported they are used if there is an issue of bullying in the class. (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015) also recognise persona dolls as creative ways of tackling racism, prejudice and discrimination.

As one practitioner recognised, parents should not be overlooked as a valuable resource when teaching RE. One parent was invited into school to teach a traditional dance with a Bollywood twist, much to the enjoyment of the children. This idea was supported during an interview with the RE co-ordinator who exclaimed, *“Don’t forget that parents can be a great resource to use.”* In her class, one parent offered to make onion bhajis with the children to celebrate the religious festival of Eid.

Moreover, there was some inspiration from a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) who simulated a Baptism with the help of a priest, baptising a doll from their FP class with excellent results.

By extension, during the structured interview with the teacher, it was found they had recreated a wedding day during their Cornerstones topic of “Happiness.” Roles were assigned for a bride, groom, bridesmaids, best man, mother and father of the bride and mother and father of the groom. Children made invitations, made a cake and made biscuit wedding favours in the lead up to the wedding. On the day, a hairdresser arrived to style the bridal party’s hair; the children dressed in their wedding finery and got married in the local Church in front of the local priest, followed by a wedding reception in the local community. Simply summed up by the ‘bride’ aged 4, *“The wedding was really lots of fun. It was my bestest wedding I’ve ever been to.”* More thoughts and opinions from the children are within appendix twelve and photographs of the wedding can be found in appendix thirteen.

Similarly, during the interview with the RE co-ordinator, it emerged an impromptu funeral had taken place for the reception class’ goldfish. This is yet another excellent example of teaching issues relating to RE in a creative way. The full transcript of this interview can be found in appendix eleven.

For further information on all the responses relating to this question, please see appendix five.

Question Five
Which Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies do you use in RE?

Since OfSTED (2013) noted that assessment of RE continued to be a weakness in primary schools, the author was interested to note how AfL is used within RE lessons. Creative RE lessons can involve engaging with discussions which means pupils write less in these sessions than other subjects. For this reason, it also makes it difficult to assess their learning.

Most responses included the most common AfL strategies such as the use of mini whiteboards and lollypop sticks, however, 27% of practitioners discussed a strategy called, “Pose, pause... pounce, bounce,” which appears to lend itself perfectly with teaching RE creatively. A practitioner “poses” a question and “pauses” to allow children to think of a response. A child is “pounced” upon for their thoughts and bounced off onto other children

to see if they agree/disagree. *“It gets to a point where my year 6’s are discussing between themselves and I am merely a facilitator.”*

For a list of all the AfL strategies mentioned, please see appendix six.

Question six invited participants to list ways in which they promote the key skills within RE. For a full list of creative answers, please see appendix seven.

Question Seven
What do you find challenging about teaching RE creatively?

27% of practitioners stated their lack of subject knowledge was their biggest barrier to creative RE. This view is supported by Webster (2010) who recognised that some practitioners lack the confidence to teach the subject due to insufficient subject knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, poor subject knowledge will have a direct effect on the teaching of RE (Elton-Chalcraft, 2015).

A further 18% of participants noted that finding time to teach RE was a difficulty in their school. The same percentage of participants noted the lack of artefacts as one of their biggest challenges. Although this is a problem and is dependent upon the school, during the interview with the RE co-ordinator (appendix eleven) she explained when there was a lack of religious artefacts in a previous school, she went to extra lengths to find some. *“Ask if you can lend some from a place of worship, do you know someone who follows a particular faith?”* An example was given when she even asked a student teacher to borrow some artefacts from her university library; *“Go that extra mile!”*

Interestingly, an NQT stated honestly they felt they did not have *“enough support to teach it”* and added they feel they have not *“observed enough teachers teaching it.”* It is presumed this NQT will have observed many literacy and numeracy sessions throughout their teacher training, so it leaves one to argue the reasons why enough RE lessons had not been observed. Could it be the fact RE is easily demoted in favour of literacy and numeracy (Revell, 2005) or could it be the fact some teachers underestimate the value and importance of the subject (Webster, 2010)? Another practitioner confirmed RE was the subject they are *“least confident about teaching.”*

Lastly, 18% of respondents claimed they are “not creative” enough to teach creatively, *“I’m not a singer, dancer [or] artist.”* This is one of the biggest misconceptions of creativity; Lat Blaylock, editor of RE Today states in response to these suggestions that he is none of

those things either. *“Teachers are in a creative line of work, we make lessons and learning experiences; this is a creative process,”* He adds that religions themselves are incredibly creative and dynamic forces; they explode with creativity (Blaylock, 2015).

Question Eight
What advice would you give to practitioners who lack the confidence to teach RE?

One practitioner explains they use a ‘*hook them in*’ approach at the start of the lesson, by encouraging a discussion of an open question. This question has no right or wrong answer and encourages pupils to listen to other points of view while developing their questioning techniques and ability to argue in a mature, sensible way.

From the interview with the RE teacher, her advice was to “accept the fact you are not an expert in every single religion out there. Ask for advice from others and they will, I have no doubt, be more than happy to help you.”

Following the interview with the RE co-ordinator, *she encourages others to make lessons hands on and practical and use real artefacts; “It adds an exciting element rather than looking online or in books.”* Children need to feel, touch and smell these real life objects for them to have a better understanding and meaning of them.

Finally, in response to those practitioners who lack confidence in teaching RE, *“Embrace the fact that you don’t know everything, but be honest with your pupils and look at/discuss possible answers together.”*

To conclude, the answers to these questions have helped the author to establish what excellent strategies are currently used, the challenges some people may face and how to become a better, more confident teacher of RE.

Limitations of the research

As the author decided to target experienced practitioners through an electronic questionnaire, the opportunity to probe respondents further was not possible. Although a teacher of RE and an RE co-ordinator were interviewed, to benefit this research further, more structured interviews need to be obtained in order to gather a more in depth response.

It is also suggested that further research could investigate how RE is taught creatively in faith schools compared to community schools.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Given the depth of qualitative information retrieved from all eleven respondents from the questionnaire, the two structured interviews and the informal conversations with the children, it is evident that there are many exciting ways of teaching RE creatively. However, research suggests that a lack of confidence due to poor subject knowledge and understanding is partly responsible for some practitioners not teaching the subject as creatively as they could. In comparison with support available for teaching literacy creatively, there does not appear to be the same amount of support to aid practitioners with creative RE lessons, other than schemes of work, such as Discovery RE which naturally involves a cost unaffordable to some schools.

Reflecting upon the aims of this research project, chapters 2 and 4 demonstrate examples of how RE is currently being taught creatively in the primary classroom. Many creative approaches, such as P4C and Enquiry Based Learning, allow pupils to take ownership of their own learning through discussion based activities. Additionally, the value of hands on, practical activities must not be underestimated and are supported by theorists such as John Dewey and Piaget. The use of handling artefacts, inviting guest speakers into the class and engaging with educational visits have incredible benefits to learners. By including just some of these techniques in the classroom will make the lessons more memorable and engaging, providing the best possible outcome for learners.

As this research has shown, there are certain challenges faced by teachers; namely the fact that they lack confidence to teach RE due to a poor subject knowledge and understanding. However, the advice received from experienced practitioners and RE co-ordinators; for instance, ask for advice and accept the fact you are not God; you cannot possibly know the answers to everything; has proven invaluable, not only to the author, but to the readers also.

Although some practitioners struggle to view RE as a credible, academic subject, Welsh Government publications, Estyn and Ofsted reports, as discussed in Chapter 2, acknowledge the importance of such a subject in today's 21st Century multi-cultural Britain. RE plays an, often underestimated, pivotal role in how a child develops and begins to understand the world around them. Religions explode with creativity, from the architecture to the music. The possibilities of creative RE teaching are astounding.

Lastly, in light of the aforementioned research, the author has gained an invaluable insight into how RE is taught creatively in primary schools, making them an improved practitioner of

RE. From this research, it is evident the main thing that RE seeks to promote is creative thinking. Everybody is creative in one way or another but the beauty is, what one person finds creative, another person may not, ergo, creativity means different things to different people. When taught creatively, RE can be an enlightening, thought-provoking, liberating subject for both learners and practitioners and the benefits should not be underestimated. Providing learners with the ability to question, reflect and respect other religions and cultures creates well rounded learners and better global citizens, making the world a safer, more harmonious place to live. That is creative RE.

Word count: 6,437

Reference List

Bastide, D. (1999) *Coordinating religious education across the primary school*. London: Falmer Press.

Blaylock, L. (2015) 'Creative RE is better RE.' [ONLINE] Available at <http://request.org.uk/teachers/teacher-training/2013/10/07/creative-re-is-better-re/> [Accessed 05 April 2015].

Centre for British Teachers. (2011) *Teaching, Learning and Community Cohesion: A study of primary and secondary schools' responses to a new statutory duty*, Research Report. Reading: CFBT.

Davies, G. (2004) *Education Transitions: Religious Education in Primary Schools*. Bangor: University of Wales, Bangor.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. (2008a) *Creative Development*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. (2008b) *Framework for Children's Learning for 3-7 year olds in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. (2008c) *National Exemplar Framework for Religious Education for 3-19 year-old in Wales*, Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. (2011) *Religious Education: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3 - Key messages for planning learning and teaching*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2010) *Religious Education in English Schools. Non-Statutory Guidance on RE*. Nottingham: DCSF.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2004) *Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums*. Leicester: University of Leicester.

Department for Education and Skills. (2004) *Religious Education, the Non Statutory National Framework*. London: QCA.

Elton-Chalcraft, S. (2015) *Teaching Religious Education Creatively*. Oxon: Routledge.

Erricker, C., Lowndes, J. and Bellchambers, E. (2011) *Primary Religious Education – A new approach*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Grigg, R. and Hughes, S. (2013) *Teaching Primary Humanities*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Joubert, M.M. (2001) 'The art of creative teaching: NACCCE and beyond', in A. Craft, B. Jeffrey and M. Liebling (eds) *Creativity in Education*. London: Continuum.

Migration Observatory. (2014) 'Changes to the Migrant Population of Wales, 2001-2011.' Article dated 4th March 2014. Available at <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/press-releases/changes-migrant-population-wales-2001-2011>. [Accessed 20.12.2014].

NACCCE. (1999) *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*. London, DFEE.

Newton, L.D. (2012) *Creativity for a New Curriculum: 5-11*. Oxon: Routledge Limited.

OFSTED. (2007) *Making Sense of Religion: A report on religious education in schools and the impact of locally agreed syllabuses*. London: OFSTED.

OFSTED. (2010) *Transforming Religious Education: Religion Education in Schools 2006-09*. Manchester: OFSTED.

OFSTED. (2013) *Religious Education: Realising the Potential*. Manchester: OFSTED.

Pound, L. (2005) *How Children Learn: From Montessori to Vygotsky - Educational Theories and Approaches Made Easy*. London: Step Forward Publishing.

Revell, L. (2005) 'Student Primary Teachers and their experience of religious education in schools', *British Journal of Religious Education* 27:3, 215-26.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (date unknown) *Non-Statutory Guidance on Religious Education*. London: QCA.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (2004) *Creativity: Find it, Promote it*. London: QCA.

Watson, B. (1993) *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education*. London: Longman.

Watson, B. and Thompson, P. (2007) *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education*, Second Edition. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Webster, M. (2010) *Creative Approaches to Teaching Primary RE*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Welsh Assembly Government. (2009) *Getting On Together - A Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government

Bibliography

Bastide, D. (1992) *Good Practice in Primary Religious Education 4-11*. London: The Falmer Press.

Bruce, T. (2004) *Cultivating Creativity in Babies, Toddlers and Young Children*. Oxon: Hodder Arnold.

Copley, T. (2004) *Spiritual Development in the State School: Worship and Spirituality in the Education System of England and Wales*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

Copley, T. (2008) *Teaching Religion: Sixty years of Religious Education*, 2nd edition. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

Craft, A., Jeffrey, B. and Leibling, M. (2001) *Creativity in Education*. London: Bloomsbury.

Department for Children Schools and Families. (2007) *Guidance on the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion*. London: DCSF Publications.

Department for Education. (2011) *Community cohesion and PREVENT: how have schools responded?* London: DfE Publications.

Desailly, J. (2012) *Creativity in the Primary Classroom*. London: Sage Publications.

Eaude, T. (2012) *Children's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development: Primary and Early Years*. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Edwards, L.C. (2010) *The Creative Arts, A process approach for teachers and children*. New Jersey: Pearson Education Limited.

Grigg, R. (2010) *Becoming an Outstanding Primary School Teacher*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Starko, A.J. (2009) *Creativity in the Classroom*. Oxon : Routledge Limited.

Welsh Assembly Government. (2011) *Respect and Resilience, Developing Community Cohesion – A Common Understanding for Schools and their Communities*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Welsh Government. (2012) 'Getting on Together, A Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales.' Available at

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsijlg/publications/commsafety/100706gotreaden.pdf>. [Accessed 20.02.2015].

Welsh Government. (2014) *Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2014-2016*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government. (2014) *Qualified for Life, An education improvement plan for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.