



Every Child Matters in RE

A short guide for new tutors in ITE

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Introduction:

It may seem paradoxical to state that education is in the “business” of allowing time and space for transformation. It is a process that facilitates positive and active change to allow for growth and inspire confidence in the full human potential and aspirations of each person and is thus a vehicle for individual personal liberation. Hay and Nye comment that teachers are not primarily working to process information or train in thinking skills. “It ought to be self evident that when adults are working with children they are primarily communicating a way of being human” Hay D. Nye R. 2006 p148)

Perhaps enjoying this type of re-creation is not what was envisaged by the writers of the “Enjoy and Achieve” outcome of the Framework but without the possibility of transformation and re-creation for both teacher and pupil, Religious Education fails to be true to its own desired outcomes, which, it turns out, so closely mirror many of the aspirations of Every Child Matters.

Grey (2006) in his article “The disenchantment and re-enchantment of childhood in an age of globalisation” urges a turning away from “the market’s language of desire” towards “satisfying relationships, intimacy, meaningful communities, shared values”. These are not necessarily the priorities of society or government (Taggart G. 2002) Government documents do not habitually use such visionary descriptions. However, surely some of these aspirations are behind the five outcomes of Every Child Matters, and the predictable presence of targets, indicators and inspection criteria for these outcomes cannot entirely obliterate the potential agenda for transformation in the avowed aim to “put improving children’s well-being at the heart of our policies... by focusing on the whole child”. (Watson 2006)

A key phrase here is “well-being”. The focus of Religious Education is being human in all its, perplexity, diversity and celebration and asking the questions “Who am I?” “What narrative do I live by?” “What narratives do human beings live by?” Some encounter with what is described by Keast (Carr D. Holden J. 2003 p164) as the religious frameworks of “the searching for meaning, seeing beyond, through and across the mundane, the quest for unity” is essential if the being is to be prefixed by the adjective well. The role of Religious Education is vital and energising in providing the time and space for this encounter.

Learning about and learning from religion is to share in the quest for well-being. Participation in this quest is an holistic engagement of intellect, body and spirit. Given these perspectives on the nature of Religious Education in the curriculum it would be curious if consideration of the Every Child Matters initiative did not figure significantly in the thinking behind and practical delivery of ITE Cross Curricular and Religious Education programmes.

The concern with educating the “whole child” has figured prominently in the title of publications focusing specifically on spiritual development, (Best 1996, Erricker et al 1997) All areas of learning in the primary curriculum include a spiritual dimension and foster a spiritual perspective and all are concerned with the holistic welfare of teacher and child. How can student teachers be supported in

identifying the unique contribution of Religious Education to this process of promoting the well-being of the whole child?

The government initiative “Every Child Matters” may be seen as partly originating in the context of negative and destructive horror at the evidence of violence and abuse towards children. From this negative context has appeared a potentially positive policy, enshrined in the Children Act 2004 and described by Watson (2006) as “the massive change programme underway to improve the well-being of all children and young people in England”.

Discussion Points:

- Do you agree that Religious Education is “in the business of transformation and re-creation?” Does this link with the vision that every child matters?
- How do the major world religions and non-religious life stances define a state of well-being and what vocabulary is used to denote this?
- How do these religions and non-religious life stances teach that this state of wellbeing can be achieved?
- What similarities and differences are there between these definitions and teachings?
- Is the nature of well-being in a variety of faiths and non-religious life stances ever made an explicit area of learning in the primary or secondary requirements of Agreed Syllabuses?

Five Outcomes: Four Attitudes: Two Attainment Targets: One SEF!

The Non-Statutory National framework for Religious Education (QCA 2004 p13) cites four key attitudes as essential for good learning throughout all phases of religious education. These are

- self-awareness
- respect for all
- open mindedness
- appreciation and wonder.

Thus, in advance of Every child Matters, Religious Education has already recognised that good learning arises from fostering growth and development in the four attitudes above. The knowledge and empathetic understanding of lives of faith and vision leading to respect for all and open mindedness, emerges from Attainment Target One. The dimension of Attainment Target 2, Learning from Religion, promotes provision for personal reflection stimulated by this knowledge and understanding and therefore the opportunity for developing self-awareness and experiencing appreciation and wonder. Blaylock has provided a stimulating survey of the practical application of classroom activity to the areas of tolerance, sensitivity and respect in his article in Resource “Pushing the tolerant frontier: What more can be done to fulfil RE’s aims of tolerance, sensitivity and respect” (Blaylock 2006)

These attitudes would seem to be an obvious context for the description of the teacher’s role in the context of Every Child Matters described by Cheminais (2006 p1) “Teachers working in future educational settings will adopt a more holistic approach, focused on the whole child’s well-being, and not solely on his/her learning”.

The above attitudes should encourage high quality teaching and learning in Religious Education and contribute practical curriculum application to these elements of the Five Outcomes

Be Healthy: Children and Young People are mentally and emotionally healthy

Enjoy and Achieve: Children and Young People achieve personal and social development

Make a Positive Contribution: Children and Young People develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges

A notable absence from the characteristics of well-being as defined by the Five Outcomes is spiritual health. In their book on Spiritual Intelligence, Zohar and Marshall (2000) point to agents of transformation and therefore indicators of spiritual intelligence, the capacity to:

- see life as a creative process of improvement
- practise opportunities for inner dialogue
- recognise a perspective beyond
- meditate on truths

In Religious Education, teachers and pupils will be introduced to the lives of those who struggle to fulfil these capacities and will be encouraged to develop these capacities for themselves. Watson concedes that Every Child Matters is “well placed to, at last, challenge the spiritless pedagogy of the National Curriculum” but laments a lost opportunity to widen the interpretation of a child’s entitlement. “To limit our understanding of spirituality to things like the well-being and voice of the whole child is to limit the richness of what can be meant by spirituality: those transcendent beliefs and values which give deepest meaning to our lives”. (Watson p7)

In 1999 the Kent SACRE produced a document entitled “Shaping the Spirit”. Perhaps this would have been an appropriate addition to the phrase Every Child Matters. The spiritual capacities described in the document focus the nature of:

- Self Awareness and Self Knowledge
- Sensitivity and Responsiveness
- Inner Strength and Resilience
- Ideals and Aspiration
- Love and Relationships
- Seeking and Striving
- Reflection on Experience

Religious education brings these elements as a gift to the curriculum. They could also be a gift to Every Child Matters and weave into many of the ideals of the document.

OfSTED guidance indicates that the practicalities of integrating the Every Child Matters agenda into the self-evaluation form may be complicated in respect of personal well-being. “The ECM agenda is new. You need to be conscious of it throughout your evaluation. Think about what difference your provision has made and how do you know? Some parts of the agenda, such as physical well being are easier to evaluate than those aspects that deal with personal development. Even though it may be more difficult, you should make sharp judgements and find factual evidence to support them.” (Ofsted SEF Guidance) Religious Education throughout the school, if informed by the above discussion, will naturally present many positive examples of the sharp judgements and factual evidence required by the OfSTED self evaluation form

Discussion Points:

- Do you agree that the four attitudes above are central to the integrity of teaching and learning in Religious Education?
- Is there such a dimension as “spiritual” health which should be put alongside/replace mental and emotional health in the Be Healthy outcome?
- If so, what would you use as “targets” or indicators” for this?
- Why do you think spirituality is not a feature in Every Child Matters?

What is My World? Every Child Matters to the Religious Education Teacher?

The nature of the Religious Education enterprise from Foundation Stage to education from 14-19 in the context of Every Child Matters could be summarised in the diagram below:



Working Together

Key Principle

Breaking down the gap between staff and parents/carers

Child, Family, Community, Environment as Partners in Planning, Resources and Reflecting

Who am I?

Homes, Families and Communities

Key Principle

Sharing My World at Home and in the Community

Artefacts, Celebrations, Special Days, Special Food, Special Clothes, Special Music, Stories, Pilgrimages, Conversations, Visits to Homes, Places of

The Holistic Life of the Child/Young Person

Key Principle

Exploring Inner and Outer Worlds

Stories, Festivals, Worship, Rites of Passage, The Natural World, My Inner Life

Who am I?

The World Around Me

Key Principle

Being Part of Creation

The Local Community, The Local Environment, Thinking Global, Faith and Secular Responses to Global Challenges

BEING HEALTHY Mental and Emotional Health

This will arise from an affirmation and celebration of a sense of identity as a wide variety of beliefs and lifestyles are explored and reflected upon. Every child can contribute to Religious Education because it is concerned with the deepest questions of being human and values the inner and outer world of parents/carers, teachers and pupils.

STAYING SAFE Security and Stability

This affirmation and celebration relates directly to a sense of security and self-esteem and thus mental and emotional health. It is reinforced by the discovery of how love and relationships are valued in a variety of faith traditions

In the affirmation of all pupils as they investigate who they are and explore their inner and outer worlds within the context of learning about and from religions and non-religious life stances in the areas indicated above, Religious Education contributes explicitly to the Five Outcomes.

Alongside the affirmation of cultural and religious identity of the child or young person as learner goes the affirmation of the cultural and religious identity of their family and community. The Introduction to Every Child Matters highlights the need for “schools offering a range of extended services that help pupils engage and achieve, and build stronger relationships with parents and the wider community”. These stronger relationships can be fostered within an atmosphere of respect built around the mutual exploration of belief systems and community activities that may include worship.

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION Decision Making

High quality teaching and learning in Religious Education generates thinking skills and problem solving which may be related to ethical and moral decisions which are issues for individuals and faith communities. Pupils are encouraged to view different perspectives and motivations and to explore sources of authority and varied reactions to them.

Supporting the Community

Links with local faith communities are essential if Religious Education is to focus on living faiths and the lives of believers. Visits to places of worship involve communication with parents/carers and diverse faith groups. To be either the host or the guest on such a visit is of positive benefit to both parties.

Supporting the Environment

Care for creation is a crucial issue that pupils will encounter in their study of religions. The global nature of all the major world faiths invites the inclusion in the Religious Education curriculum of wide ranging experiences relating to environmental issues and principles that can be transferred to the local situation.

Self Confidence and Life Changes and Challenges

The self-confidence to think through and articulate personal beliefs and values is a critically important outcome of Religious Education. Current pedagogies such as those reviewed by Grimitt stress the contribution of the subject to the development of personal identity. The changes and challenges of life are included not only in the encounter with Rites of Passage in a variety of faiths but also in the basic presupposition that religions are centred on a way of being which helps humanity to make sense of and live with the challenges of being human. This is the stuff of Religious Education and here it is in the midst of Every Child Matters!

Discussion Points:

- In the content of a recent Locally Agreed Syllabus can you find areas that explicitly make provision for communication between the school and parents/carers and the school and local faith communities?
- Do you think that Religious Education could or should encourage community regeneration initiatives?
- How might such encouragement happen?
- Are there other ways in which Religious Education contributes to the Five Outcomes?
- Does Religious Education relate to Achieving Economic Well-Being as defined by Every Child Matters? Should it?

Conclusion: Does it Matter?

This paper has tried to demonstrate that, because of the nature of their subject in its content, creative application and opportunities for assessment, teachers of Religious Education can approach Every Child Matters with confidence and a valuable perspective to offer. The danger is that what is essentially a visionary concept will degenerate into yet more boxes of targets and indicators in which both teachers and their pupils are swallowed up into statistics. Knowledge, understanding and reflection on specific belief systems are integral to any mature growth in self-identity and wholeness, described by Wright as “the legacy of spiritual wisdom and insight” (Wright 1998 p99). The opportunity for children and young people to express their sense of self and have a belief in their ability to be heard and to seek to make a difference to their communities and environment is part of the Religious Education learning journey, whether as a discrete subject or where it is sensitively placed within cross curricular experiences in the creative curriculum.

Religious Education is centred on the premise that for thousands of years humanity has struggled with the vision that every individual matters. This vision has been worked out in a variety of beliefs about what lies beyond the immediate givenness of existence. “In the context of RE, boys and girls can be encouraged to explore their finitude in ways that heighten their sense of the specialness of human being. The awareness that emerges moves on ground that many would regard as both moral and religious. Therein too lie criteria for checking that any associated development is indeed enriching of humanity”. (Gates B. in Broadbent and Brown 2002)

Student teachers and existing practitioners of Religious Education have a vital role in bringing their intuitive sense of this dimension to the continuing discussion of the vision and implementation of Every Child Matters. The voices of the “Utopian Whispers” (Hull J. 1998) need to be heard.

Discussion Point:

- Do you think that Every Child Matters is “enriching for humanity”?

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