

Inclusive Study of Religions and other Worldviews in Publicly-funded Schools in Democratic Societies

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This article was originally published as a chapter in Jackson, R. (2015) 'Inclusive Study of Religions and Other Worldviews in Publicly-funded Schools in Democratic Societies' in Kristina Stoeckl and Olivier Roy (Eds.) *The Future of Religious Education in Europe*, San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute, 7-18. Open access e-book at <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/37735>. It is republished online at Religious Education & Security (<http://blogs.mcgill.ca/religiouseducationandsecurity/>) with the expressed permission of the author and according to the requirements of the open access e-book in which it was originally published.

Introduction

This article outlines some issues in incorporating the study of religions, or the study of religions together with non-religious worldviews, into the curricula of publicly-funded schools in democratic states. The issues are discussed in general, but particular attention is given to examples from England and from work conducted within the Council of Europe, including a Recommendation from the Committee of Ministers dealing with this topic¹ and a text designed to assist policymakers and practitioners in interpreting and applying ideas from the Recommendation.²

Religion and education in Western democracies: key drivers of change

The processes of secularisation, pluralisation and globalisation have stimulated debate about the place of religion in publicly funded schools leading to some policy developments and changes in the education systems of some European countries. In England, where religious education is a distinct subject on the school timetable, these changes began to have an impact on practice, theory and policy in the late 1960s, resulting in changes to legislation in 1988.

A further influence for change results from the debate about the place of religion in the public sphere of democracies, much of it coming after the events of 9/11 in the USA³. For example, the shift in Council of Europe policy, which resulted in new work on the study of religion in public education from 2002, was related to that debate.⁴

¹ Council of Europe, "Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education" (2008).

² Robert Jackson, *Signposts: Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2014a).

³ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" (*European Journal of Philosophy* 14, 1, 2006), 1–25.

⁴ Council of Europe, *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004); "Intercultural education" (Council of Europe 2008); *Signposts* (Jackson 2014a); John Keast, ed., *Religious diversity and intercultural education: A reference book for schools* (Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg, 2007).

In England, the process of secularization was reflected in the changing attitudes of young people in schools, with empirical research conducted in the 1960s suggesting that traditional Biblical education was felt by many older secondary school students to be irrelevant to their personal questions and concerns⁵ or to include an unwarranted form of religious teaching which lacked breadth and opportunities for critical analysis and discussion.⁶

Pluralization through migration, especially since the 1960s, led many educators to shift the focus of religious studies in fully state-funded schools from a form of single faith religious teaching (in England, a form of non-denominational Christianity taught primarily through Biblical studies) to a ‘non-confessional’, inclusive, multi-faith approach, including learning *about* the religions of relatively newly-established minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims as well as Christianity and Judaism.

Theory and methodology from the phenomenology of religion, offering an impartial and objective approach to the study of religions which acknowledged increasing secularity and plurality, was influential from the early 1970s. A key source was the global perspective of Professor Ninian Smart⁷ and the project on religious education that he led at the University of Lancaster.⁸ However, any direct influence of theory and specific methodology (whether Smart’s or anyone else’s) on practice in schools is difficult to assess; the relationship between theory, and its associated methodology, to policy and to general practice in schools is complex and not easy to determine.⁹ More ‘bottom up’ developments, reflecting secularization and pluralization as experienced by students and teachers in school, also played an important part in precipitating change in schools.¹⁰ With regard to fully state-funded schools (as distinct from schools with a religious character receiving state funding), the changes during the 1960s and 1970s were recognized in law in the 1988 Education Reform Act.¹¹

Representing plurality: ‘multicultural’ and ‘intercultural’

There is insufficient space here to discuss in detail the emergence of inclusive and pluralistic religious education in relation to the ongoing debate about ‘multiculturalism’. Some religious education theory has worked with sophisticated formulations of multiculturalist theory, drawing on empirical research dealing with the interplay of ‘dominant’ and ‘demotic’

⁵ Harold Loukes, *New Ground in Christian Education* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

⁶ Edwin Cox, *Sixth form religion: a study of the beliefs and of the attitudes to religion, religious instruction, and morals, of a sample of grammar school sixth form pupils* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

⁷ Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London: Collins, 1969).

⁸ Schools Council, *Religious Education in secondary schools* (London: Evans Methuen, 1971).

⁹ Oddrun M.H. Bråten, *Towards a methodology for comparative studies in religious education: A study of England and Norway*. (Münster: Waxmann, 2013).

¹⁰ W. Owen Cole, *Religion in the Multifaith School*, 1st edn. (Yorkshire Committee for Community Relations, 1972).

¹¹ Adam Dinham and Robert Jackson, “Religion, Welfare and Education.” In *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, eds. L. Woodhead and R. Catto (London: Routledge, 2012), 272-294; Brian Gates and Robert Jackson, “Religion and education in England.” In *Religious education at schools in Europe, Part 2: Western Europe*, eds. Martin Rothgangel, Robert Jackson and Martin Jäggle (Göttingen: Vienna University Press/V&R unipress, 2014) 65-98.

discourses.¹² ‘Dominant discourse’ assumes the existence of distinct and separate cultures living side-by-side, while ‘demotic discourse’ recognizes the reality and significance of cultural fusion, the formation of new culture, inter-generational differences, and the emergence of new fundamentalisms.¹³ However, the rejection of multiculturalism through its identification only with ‘dominant’ discourse has been common among European politicians, including British Prime Minister David Cameron.¹⁴ Such a one-sided representation has resulted in derogatory uses of the term ‘multicultural’ and its avoidance in some official documents, such as the final report of the UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion.¹⁵ The Council of Europe prefers to use the term ‘intercultural’, with its suggestion of cultural interaction and dialogue,¹⁶ and regards inclusive education about religions and non-religious convictions as a subset of intercultural education.¹⁷ Some writers use the term ‘diversity’, rather than multiculturalism. For example, in his work on ‘super-diversity’ Steven Vertovec analyses the complexity and changing character of cultural and religious diversity in the light of global, regional and local factors and their relationship over time.¹⁸ This, of course, includes the emergence of radicalized Islam in various European contexts.

The scope of the subject

With regard to pluralization, there is an additional argument that an inclusive school subject should cover non-religious philosophies as well as religions. This view has been taken by the Council of Europe in its Ministerial Recommendation of 2008,¹⁹ and by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in its *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*.²⁰ In both cases, the argument for extending the range of ‘inclusive religious education’ relates to the human rights principle of freedom of religion and belief (‘belief’ encompassing non-religious convictions). We will return to this discussion below but, for the moment, will concentrate on studies of religion(s) in schools.

¹² Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities* (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹³ Robert Jackson, *Rethinking religious education and plurality: Issues in diversity and pedagogy* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

¹⁴ David Cameron, “Munich speech on 5 February 2011 on radicalisation and Islamic extremism” (*New Statesman*); replied to in Robert Jackson, “Cameron, ‘multiculturalism’ and education about religions and beliefs” (2011)

¹⁵ Commission on Integration and Cohesion, *Our Shared Future*, Final Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (London, 2007), 13.

¹⁶ Martyn Barrett, ed., *Interculturalism and Multiculturalism: Similarities and Differences* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2013).

¹⁷ Council of Europe, “Intercultural Education”; Jackson, *Signposts*.

¹⁸ Steven Vertovec, *The Emergence of Super-Diversity in Britain*, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No. 25 (University of Oxford, 2006).

¹⁹ Jackson, *Signposts*, 67-75.

²⁰ OSCE, *The Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools* (Warsaw: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007).

Names for studying religion in schools

As we have seen in relation to the term ‘multicultural’, discussions about the place of studies of religion in publicly-funded schools are often hampered by the ambiguity of various terms.²¹ Thus, for example, ‘religious education’ can be used to describe forms of *initiation into* what we might call ‘*religious understanding*’, through learning and religious practice. Sometimes, the terms ‘religious instruction’ and ‘religious nurture’ are used for these processes. However, ‘religious education’ often refers to the promotion of an inclusive, general public understanding of religion or religions – what we might term ‘*understanding religion*’. Terms such as ‘inclusive religious education’²² or ‘integrative religious education’²³ are used in this way. The American Academy of Religion uses the term ‘religion education’ (as distinct from ‘religious education’) to refer to an inclusive education about religions.²⁴

The increasingly-used term ‘religious literacy’ is also used in different ways. Many writers use it to connote a general understanding of religious language and practice, open to everyone, which can result from learning about religions.²⁵ However, some use the term religious literacy to imply the development of an *insider’s* use of religious language.²⁶

Understanding Religion and Religious Understanding

Some proponents of ‘understanding religion’, often drawing on methodologies from the science of religions, see the fundamental aim of the subject purely in terms of providing accurate information about religions; any discussion of personal responses or views by students is regarded as outside the remit of the subject.²⁷

Others see it as involving the acquisition of accurate information, together with the provision of opportunities for students to articulate their own views, including personal responses to their learning. For example, in the interpretive approach to religious education,²⁸ students learn about religions (through learning information and discussing issues concerned with how

²¹ Jackson, *Signposts*, 27-31.

²² Robert Jackson, “Addressing Religious Extremism: A Positive Approach for Policy Makers and Practitioners.” In *Religion and conflict: responding to the challenges*, ed. T. Thorp and D. Cere (London: Tony Blair Faith Foundation, 2014b), 70-77.

²³ Wanda Alberts, *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study-of-religions Approach* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

²⁴ American Academy of Religion, *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* (American Academy of Religion, 2010)

²⁵ *Ibid.*; Diane Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁶ Marius Felderhof, “Secular humanism.” In *Debates in religious education*, ed. L.P. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2012).

²⁷ Alberts, “Integrative Religious Education”; Tim Jensen, “RS Based RE in Public Schools: a Must for the Secular State,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 55 2/3 (2008), 123-150.

²⁸ Robert Jackson, *Religious education: an interpretive approach* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997); Jackson, *Rethinking religious education and plurality: Issues in diversity and pedagogy* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004); Jackson, “Understanding religious diversity in a plural world: the interpretive approach.” In *International handbook of the religious, moral and spiritual dimensions of education*, ed. M. de Souza et al. (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer Academic Publishers, 2006), 399-414; Jackson, “Understanding the religions and worldviews of others.” Alliance of Civilizations Forum. Istanbul, Turkey, 6 April 2009 (2009a); Jackson, “Studying religions: the interpretive approach in brief” (2009b).

religions are portrayed in various contexts [*representation*], and studying how religious language is used and religious actions are performed by practitioners [*interpretation*]). They are also given opportunities, in the context of the ‘civil’ classroom and in an age-appropriate manner, to express what they think is positive about the material they have studied, to articulate criticisms of the beliefs and values they have encountered, and to make contributions to the review of study methods [*reflexivity*].

In some European education systems, such a hermeneutical and discursive approach would be viewed positively, while in others, only an approach concerned with the provision of information would be considered appropriate within publicly-funded schools. Some writers look for ways of adapting the interpretive approach to education systems which do not permit the articulation personal views by students. For example, Bruce Grelle does this, in the case of the United States, by turning the idea of reflexivity from the expression of personal views of class members into a more distanced consideration of issues relating to democratic citizenship.²⁹

Some writers would argue that *any* approach aiming purely to develop an understanding of religion(s) is incompatible with all approaches intending to nurture young people into religious understanding. At one end of the spectrum, some critics argue that genuine religious education *must* include some element of initiation into religious life.³⁰ At the opposite end of the spectrum, others are concerned that *any* nurturing role for religious education militates against an objective understanding of religions.³¹

However, it can be argued that some approaches to developing an understanding of religion are compatible with certain (outward-looking) approaches aiming to develop religious understanding.³² Proponents of this view maintain that the individual’s religious understanding can, in principle, contribute experience that facilitates an understanding of the religious position of others, just as an understanding of religious plurality can inform one’s own religious understanding. Indeed, many educators who are involved in educating for religious understanding within their faith communities regard it as important that learners have opportunities to develop a cognisance of religious diversity.³³ Furthermore, dialogue between students experiencing each form of education can contribute to the goals of both approaches.³⁴

²⁹ Bruce Grelle, “Defining and Promoting the Study of Religion in British and American Schools.” In *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of Education*, ed. M. de Souza et al. (Dordrecht: the Netherlands, Springer Academic Publishers, 2006), 461-474.

³⁰ Liam Gearon, *Masterclass in Religious Education: Transforming Teaching and Learning* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); replied to in Robert Jackson, “Misrepresenting Religious Education’s Past and Present in Looking Forward: Gearon Using Kuhn’s Concepts of Paradigm, Paradigm Shift and Incommensurability,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion & Education* 36:1, (2015), 64-78. See also Robert Jackson, “The Politicisation and Securitisation of Religious Education? A Rejoinder”, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63: 3, (2015), 345-366.

³¹ Jensen, “RS Based RE.”

³² Jackson, “Religious Extremism.”

³³ Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran, eds., *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2013).

³⁴ Ursula McKenna, Julia Ippgrave and Robert Jackson, *Inter Faith Dialogue by Email in Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the Building E-Bridges Project* (Münster: Waxmann, 2008).

Understanding religion(s): Intrinsic and Instrumental Aims

The discussion here will concentrate on approaches that aim *to develop an understanding of religion(s)* – including the language, experience and values of religious people. The view is taken that national policies should include educational activity that promotes it, for a range of reasons, both intrinsic to the nature of education and instrumental to the benefit of individuals and society.

The ‘intrinsic’ aim concerns the nature of human experience. If education is about understanding the full breadth of human experience, then ‘understanding religion’ must be included. In an international context where skills for employability and industrial competitiveness – and, increasingly, concerns about security – can dominate educational policy, this view acts as a counterweight, pressing for the inclusion of studies of religious and related ethical issues, and reflection on these, as intrinsic to education.

There are also important instrumental aims for studying religions. Instrumental arguments tend to emphasize either the *personal* development of students or their *social* development, or a combination of the two (as in Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education – PSHE – in England, which complements religious education and other curriculum subjects). As noted above, arguments emphasizing the *personal* development of students often emphasize the potential contribution of the study of religions to students’ moral development, or stress the importance of students engaging reflexively with religious material in developing their own views on religion and values.³⁵ Study of, and reflection on, different religions can help students to clarify their own personal religious position or framework of values or appreciate the relationship between another’s position relative to their own. Ongoing reflection is a ‘conversational’ process in which students, whatever their family or cultural background, interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of their studies.

There are also important *social* reasons for studying a variety of religions and beliefs. These can relate to a recognition of the principle of freedom of religion or belief, and increasing tolerance of (and sometimes respect for) others’ views and ways of life within society. Consideration of the *limits* of freedom of human action and speech are part of the process of dialogue. Participation in the relevant debates links the social world and the individual, and is potentially a means to effective inter-religious and inter-cultural communication within plural democracies.

Arguments emphasizing the social development of students (for example, through contributing to citizenship education) range from promoting good community relations³⁶ and intercultural understanding,³⁷ to increasing awareness of the human rights principle of

³⁵ Jackson, “Religious Education”; “Understanding”; “Studying religions”.

³⁶ Cole, “Multifaith School”.

³⁷ Council of Europe, “Intercultural education”.

freedom of religion or belief and increasing tolerance of diversity,³⁸ to promoting social or community cohesion³⁹ and, in recent times, countering religious extremism.⁴⁰

With regard to linking the personal and the social, research with 14-16 year olds in eight European countries – the REDCo Project – showed support from young people for education about religious diversity. The research demonstrates that studies of religious diversity are not erosive of students’ own commitments, but can help to develop a culture of ‘living together’. The majority of 14-16 year old young people surveyed wanted opportunities to learn about and from one another’s religious perspectives in the ‘safe space’ of the classroom, with teachers providing knowledge and understanding while also facilitating dialogue effectively.⁴¹ Thus, studies of religions can contribute to broader fields such as intercultural education and education for democratic citizenship. The European REDCo research shows young people who want an opportunity to learn and talk about religion in schools. They see the classroom (not family or peer group) as the only likely potential ‘safe space’ for this to happen, and they appreciate skillful teachers who can *both* provide accurate information and manage discussions which include significant differences in viewpoint. There is no assumption, as one critic has suggested, that ‘all religions are equally true’,⁴² but there *is* a commitment to exploring the democratic and human rights principle of freedom of religion or belief within society.

One recent example of this kind of discursive and interpretive approach is from a teacher of religious education in the UK, a few days after the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015.

Year 8 (age 12-13) spent one hour a week last term (from September to December 2014) studying Islam. We spent about three weeks examining the Islamic concept of *jihad*; both greater and lesser *jihad*. This work built up to an extended piece of writing that examined the Islamist terrorism and violence of ISIS and contrasted it with the criteria and teachings of lesser *jihad* in Islam. We also learned about the Islamic views on the depiction of Allah and the prophets of Islam in art. This led us to discussion and reflection on the diverse reactions to the Danish cartoon controversy (involving *Jyllands-Posten*).

The students discussed and completed work about the different reactions to the cartoons, the right to (and any limits to) freedom of speech, the right to freedom of belief, and what Islam might be said to teach about appropriate responses to provocation or offence felt.

These issues were revisited in a discussion lesson that took place days after the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, including the one on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*. The students had a firm grasp of the many issues involved in these attacks and the reaction from the public, the media, and religious

³⁸ OSCE, *Toledo Guiding Principles*.

³⁹ DCSF, *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion* (London: UK Government, Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) 2007).

⁴⁰ Joyce Miller, “Religious extremism, religious education and the interpretive approach.” In *Religion in Education: Innovation in International Research*, eds. J. Miller et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 121-133.

⁴¹ Ina Ter Avest et al., eds., *Dialogue and Conflict on Religion. Studies of Classroom Interaction on European Countries* (Waxmann: Münster, 2009); Robert Jackson, ed., *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research* (London: Routledge, 2012); Thorsten Knauth et al., eds., *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society. A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe* (Waxmann: Münster, 2008); Pille Valk et al., eds., *Teenagers’ perspectives on the role of religion in their lives, schools and societies: A European quantitative study* (Waxmann: Münster, 2009).

⁴² Gearon, “Masterclass.”

groups. Their earlier learning had clearly prepared them to respond to these events in very considered and reasoned ways.⁴³

One criticism of approaches to inclusive religious education such as this, related to the social development of students, including increasing tolerance within society, is that they have a *single, political* aim, and thereby distort the religions they claim to represent.⁴⁴ This criticism is unsustainable, since inclusive religious education, as described above, has a *variety* of aims, both intrinsic and instrumental, with instrumental aims relating to both personal and social development. Moreover, it is hard to see how any discussion of religion in society can avoid questions of politics at various levels. If religion is part of human social experience, then it clearly has a political dimension.

Religions and ‘non-religious worldviews’?

So far, the discussion has concentrated on studies of religions. However, some proponents of ‘inclusive religious education’ have extended the range of the subject to include a study of non-religious worldviews. For example, the Council of Europe’s Ministerial Recommendation concerns ‘the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education’.⁴⁵ Here, a form of inclusive education is recommended for all students, regardless of background, developing their understanding of a variety of religious *and* non-religious life stances or worldviews. This education is intended to complement any nurture within a particular religious tradition or philosophy, and aims to deepen students’ understanding of different life stances present in late modern societies, and to encourage dialogue and exchange between those from different backgrounds. It relates religions and ‘non-religious convictions’ to intercultural education, not to reduce religion to culture, but to give public recognition to the presence of different and deeply held commitments within our societies. Thus, it reflects the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 18 on ‘freedom of thought, conscience and religion’.

In 2011, the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre (a European Resource Centre for human rights and intercultural education, related to the Council of Europe and sponsored by the Norwegian Government) set up a joint committee of international experts to produce a text aiming to enable policymakers and practitioners across Europe to work constructively with the Council of Europe Recommendation in enabling the development of policy, training and practice with regard to teaching about religions and non-religious convictions. This text, entitled *Signposts – Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*, was published by the Council of Europe in late 2014.⁴⁶ Its content is informed by responses to a questionnaire sent to the education ministries of all 47 member states, plus consultations by the author with policymakers, teacher trainers, teachers and trainee teachers in a number of European countries. The book includes discussions of issues concerned with: the terminology associated with teaching about religions and beliefs; competence and didactics for understanding religions; the classroom as a safe space; the representation of religions in the

⁴³ Daniel Hugill, personal communication, 15 January 2015.

⁴⁴ Gearon, “Masterclass”, replied to in Jackson, “Misrepresenting” and Jackson “Politicisation”.

⁴⁵ Council of Europe, “Intercultural education”.

⁴⁶ Jackson, *Signposts*.

media; human rights issues; linking schools to wider communities and organizations; and dealing with non-religious convictions and worldviews in addition to religions. With regard to this last issue, a distinction is made between *organized* worldviews, such as religions and secular humanism, and *personal* worldviews of individuals. Research shows the latter often to be eclectic and unconventional. Personal worldviews might mirror particular religions or humanism, but are often more eclectic.⁴⁷ Some would argue that the school should provide opportunities for the exploration of personal as well as organized worldviews.

A broadly similar, inclusive and human rights-based approach is taken by the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* published by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.⁴⁸ This text, which advocates the study of non-religious life stances alongside religions in publicly-funded schools, has been influential on a number of projects and initiatives. These include the Education about Religions and Beliefs website which forms part of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations programme.⁴⁹

Underpinning Values and Personal Autonomy

Apart from the clarification of aims, content and didactics, there are various issues relating to inclusive religious education or education about religions and other worldviews. One is the values base of the approach, and another concerns different views about personal autonomy.

With regard to values, the intention of the approach is to help young people to understand religious and worldview diversity and, as we have seen, there are various educational aims associated with this. However, the context for learning is that of education within the democratic state. Thus, the values underpinning the idea of democracy are important, as are values associated with open academic study. With regard to democratic values, both the Council of Europe work in this field and that of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, refer to the various human rights codes as a values foundation for teaching about religions and non-religious convictions in publicly-funded schools. In particular, clauses relating to freedom of religion or belief and to respect for human dignity are referred to in relation to education about religions and non-religious convictions. Critics of a human rights values base for inclusive religious education ask why a particular set of values, which are associated with the European Enlightenment, should have this authority. The short answer is that they encapsulate the key principles of democracy. However, this does not mean that they are beyond question or discussion.

Interestingly, ‘bottom up’ approaches to the study of religious and non-religious diversity encountered through research, are often associated with the values of academic scholarship and those of community within schools. These broadly reflect human rights values. Research on classroom interaction as part of the REDCo project shows young people wanting to learn from one another about religious and worldview diversity, but also desiring moderation and constraint in order to guarantee a safe space for self-expression, for listening to the testimony of others, and for dialogue. Again, these values are consistent with human rights codes, and

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67-75.

⁴⁸ OSCE, *Toledo Guiding Principles*

⁴⁹ United Nations Alliance of Civilisations programme, <http://erb.unaoc.org/>

with an interesting attempt by the InterAction Council to link human rights to responsibilities.⁵⁰ This matter is relevant to wider issues of human rights within society; for example, the right to freedom of expression being tempered by sensitivity to the deeply held convictions of others.

Nevertheless, there can be tensions between certain human rights values and those associated with particular cultural or religious traditions. These must be acknowledged and explored in inclusive education about religions and non-religious convictions if such studies are to make a genuine contribution to *intercultural* education.

One issue relates to the idea of personal autonomy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights regard adults as autonomous individuals. However, some rights concerning children's education in or about religion and belief are delegated to parents until children reach a level of maturity at which they themselves can make decisions autonomously⁵¹.

Moreover, there are different, and sometimes conflicting, views about autonomy related to various religious stances and to different non-religious perspectives. Some religious traditions emphasize duties rather than rights specifically. For example, within Hindu tradition, certain duties fall to particular persons by virtue of their specific role within the family (for instance, the eldest son); the idea of personal autonomy is thus limited. Moreover, collective identity, rather than that of the individual may sometimes be emphasized, as in the concept of *izzat* (family honor) in north Indian/Pakistani culture and religion. In some religious traditions, very young children are regarded as part of that tradition by virtue of birth, or experience of an initiation ceremony. These points about personal autonomy are relevant to policy decisions on whether the state should support forms of faith-based education financially, and to classroom discussions of individual rights and responsibilities in relation to adherence to a particular religious position⁵².

Conclusion

The debate about inclusive studies of religions, or religions together with non-religious convictions, within public education in democratic states is not straightforward. The simple distinction between faith-based approaches aiming to develop 'religious understanding', and liberal education approaches aiming to develop an understanding of religions, or religions and non-religious convictions, is complicated by the fact that there are some different assumptions and solutions associated with different variants of both types.

With regard to inclusive education about religions and non-religious worldviews, both policymaking and practice require clarity in taking positions within the debate and in identifying approaches workable within particular national, regional or local contexts. 'National' factors, such as the histories of religion and state, and of education, are relevant to settling issues of policy in particular countries, together with wider European and global

⁵⁰ InterAction Council, *A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities* (1997).

⁵¹ OSCE, *Toledo Guiding Principles*, 34-36.

⁵² See Jackson, *Signposts*, 47-57 and 77-86 for discussion of issues related to the classroom as safe space and to human rights.

factors. It is hoped that the topics covered in the Council of Europe's publication *Signposts*⁵³ will be of assistance to educators and politicians, and that ideas will be generated, through discussion at national and local level, for developments in policy and practice and for research related to these in and across different European states.

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[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec\(2008\)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=origin](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2008)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=origin)

⁵³ *Ibid.*

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