

SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION

This page intentionally left blank

SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION

Professional Accounts of the Impact
of Spirituality on Education

BY

AIDAN GILLESPIE

Northumbria University, UK



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

© 2021 Aidan Gillespie. Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. No responsibility is accepted for the accuracy of information contained in the text, illustrations or advertisements. The opinions expressed in these chapters are not necessarily those of the Author or the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83909-895-6 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83909-894-9 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83909-896-3 (Epub)



Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Lucy, always yours. Thank you for everything.

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

<i>About the Author</i>	ix
1. Education's Spiritual Inheritance. The Development of Education and the Role of Faith, Religion and Spirituality	1
2. Teachers' Spirituality or Spiritualities?	15
3. Expressions of Spirituality: A Call to Social Action and Challenge	29
4. Spirituality beyond the Classroom. Relationships and the Development of the Individual	43
5. The Future of Spirituality in Education	57
<i>Bibliography</i>	71
<i>Index</i>	77

This page intentionally left blank

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prior to joining the Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing team at Northumbria University, Aidan Gillespie was Senior Lecturer in Primary Education at Canterbury Christ Church University in Kent. He came to Initial Teacher Education having had a successful career as a primary schoolteacher, teaching in Lincoln, Italy, London and Kent. Now as Initial Teacher Education subject lead for Religious Education at Northumbria University, he designs and teaches modules focussed on the role of religion in state education in the United Kingdom and the way in which religion, society and values intersect. With a research focus on spirituality, he is deeply interested in the intersection between spirituality and professional identity. Alongside his work in Initial Teacher Education, he also teaches on master's and postgraduate programmes in Education as well as working alongside new university colleagues in developing their practice in teaching and learning.

This page intentionally left blank

EDUCATION'S SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF FAITH, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

For me it's more about that feeling of something greater than myself. It's not about God or religion although it might be. It's about belonging and allowing others to feel that they matter.
(Toni, EYFS teacher)

What it means to be spiritual and how spirituality is defined is now open to debate. The above statement alone helps draw attention to the fact that for many in contemporary Western societies, spirituality and the spiritual component now exceeds its traditional context of recognised formal religion. While being part of a religious tradition and finding articulation and theoretical underpinning in many religious contexts, spirituality has now become as individualised and as unique as the individuals who reflect upon it. This positioning has not been borne out of a religious, spiritual or cultural vacuum but is the dynamic result of changes in society since the mid-twentieth century, not only in Britain but arguably beyond. As an element of personal identity recognised within religious traditions and extending from this, inherited Judaeo-Christian heritage in the United Kingdom, spirituality and how it is understood, defined and expressed has adapted to the developing zeitgeist and societal norms. Alongside of this, the educative project as designed and implemented by successive governments has meant that what is deemed as 'spiritual' having been previously accepted as part of a religious understanding is now conceptualised as not only part of accepted religious norms and practices but also exceeding them in more nuanced and individualised articulations. Arising out of this is the challenge of having an educational approach which

is beneficial to all but individualised in sympathy and scope of personalised spirituality. Within the curricula of Religious Education (RE) and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) education, spirituality and the study and practice of it finds an appropriate context in the study of different religious traditions which pupils must study but is neglected in how it is understood and expressed by teaching professionals themselves.

The English Teachers' Standards require all teachers to be respectful and tolerant of the faiths and beliefs of others (DFE, 2014, Section 2.4). This succinct statement is the most recent manifestation by the UK government to ensure that the faith and beliefs of pupils are respected and an appropriate forum for the discussion and appraisal of belief to be provided. The scope and limitation of this particular statement, however, allows flexibility in the approach undertaken in order to meet this requirement. This could be assumed to be intentionally so, so as to allow for a range of different teaching contexts in which educators practise, be it faith or non-faith schools, primary or secondary, etc. The apparent logic and common-sense approach, however, is void of societal context, which calls into question the narrowness of the standard's aims at achieving a harmonious approach to professional behaviour and interaction with pupils and staff in relation to respecting belief and religious plurality. What is less clear is how this relates to individual teachers and their own expression and professional articulation of their beliefs relating to religion and spirituality in the workplace, whether that is in a forum where pupils are active or between the professional exchanges of colleagues.

Reflecting society's diversity while also acknowledging the cultural and religious heritage of the population in general and individuals specifically, the Teachers' Standards (2012) reflect the current societal assumptions and norms in that the individual response to matters relating to spirituality and religion is most appropriately articulated in the personal and private sphere. The difficulty in this assumed positioning, however, is that it places teachers (as servants of the state) in a position where negotiation and interpretation is required in order to meet and not exceed the Teachers' Standards in relation to respecting the beliefs and religions of others. More specifically, the difficulty of placing in a hierarchically superior position that beliefs pertaining to spirituality and religion are of the private sphere places teachers in a difficult position professionally and socially in that their craft is expressed in the public sphere while drawing on the teacher's own personally held beliefs, religion and truths. It is this negotiated forum in which teachers practise the craft of educating pupils and which attempts to meet the requirements placed upon them by the state, while equally addressing the changing norms of society. It is the way in which individual and corporate/societal understanding and

articulation of spirituality is most clearly expressed in relation to teachers' understanding of spirituality. This could be argued to be one example of the ways in which spirituality is understood to be highly individual in the current cultural landscape having arrived at this position through dramatic cultural changes over the previous decades.

HISTORICAL INHERITANCE: FROM UNIFORMITY TO DIVERSITY

Education, the practice of teaching and the design of RE curricula has always reflected the societal norms and aspirations of the time in relation to education as a social exercise. From the period during and immediately following the Second World War, RE and Religious Instruction (RI) in particular was focussed on the majority religious position within England, that is Christianity in general and Anglicanism in particular. Prior to and during the Second World War, religion and education provided two pillars of the modernist narrative, that is a continuation of the accepted norms and traditions of English society. To be English was to be white, Christian and likely Anglican, although the latter had never been entirely so (Davie, 1994). Taken-for-granted assumptions about social and moral norms arising out of these traditions and shared historical myths and narratives provided a continuation of what constituted national identity and from this what the educational and RE/RI of the future generation should include and entail. Within this educational project was the thread of spiritual development, to ensure that individuals formed part of a greater communal project and that spirituality was central to this. Character formation and the contribution of positive spiritual development and education was to be inculcated throughout schooling and, as such, placed teachers and education professionals at the front line of developing a sense of the spiritual, which acknowledged heritage and understanding the individual as a component of a greater communal project, as opposed to an individual with personal aspirations and perspectives.

The grand narratives of Britishness and Christian tradition following the Second World War were beginning to be challenged as a modernist world view transitioned to a post-modernist perspective. The assumption of a shared collective view which could be agreed upon gave way to a more nuanced, individual and self-reflective form of religion and spirituality. The trauma following the Second World War saw a shift in national consciousness and a new scepticism and disconnection with the Christian tradition in England and other 'establishment' institutions in general which paralleled the feeling across Europe (Kay, 2003). From the 1960s onwards, secular narratives started to

be foregrounded within the debates concerning society, politics, education and religion. Secular humanist narratives provided an assumed point of common ground and reference, which was thought to provide a 'neutral' space from which discussions about religion and values could be undertaken. This subtle change of direction had implications for education as a whole and in particular, where teachers were previously understood to be social exemplars of faith, tradition and education, the attitudes and characteristics they demonstrated began to be understood as more important than the religion and traditions from whence they came, particularly in the context of maintained (non-faith) schools (Kay, 2003).

From the 1960s onwards, RE (encompassing spiritual development) saw a development in emphasis towards the fostering of an attitude towards a more individualistic concept of religion and spirituality which arose out of a re-imagining of what it meant to be a member of English society. The reasons for this are many and complex but could be argued to include tensions and opportunities which include multi-culturalism, immigration, scepticism of tradition and individualism. Rather than the inherited modernist philosophy of shared heritage and shared religion, the post-modernist placing of the individual as the centre of interpretation and interaction with religion and spirituality allowed for individuals to align themselves with competing narratives which were not as prevalent before and during the war era. Not only was this aspect of cultural recalibration present at large but also manifested itself in education and the design of curricula from the 1960s onwards. Individual rather than communal understanding of religious tradition and philosophy could be seen in the decline of church attendance among mainstream and indigenous forms of Christianity. Arising out of this decline emerged an interest in spirituality which exceeded that of not only mainstream/orthodox Christianity but of the Judaeo-Christian heritage. Fraser (2007) posits that this was because spirituality was seen to be more flexible and inclusive than what was identified as institutional and exclusive religion, the hope being to ensure that a more diverse society may best be served through a diversification of spiritual and religious understanding which was dynamic rather than static in focus.

EDUCATION, RELIGION AND REFORM POST-SECOND WORLD WAR-2020

How different governments adapted to social and cultural changes immediately following the Second World War up until the present time shows a developing concern with how religion should be examined and conceptualised

within the various educational contexts from which the governments had influence. The 1944 Education Reform Act sought to ensure that religion and cultural identity be a central concern for RE and RI programmes throughout England. Due to the diversity of different Christian traditions throughout England in particular, central government through the 1944 Education Reform Act gave control to local authorities (LAs; regional councils which oversaw state provision across England) to stipulate what the RE curriculum and coverage should be in locally maintained schools (schools outside of a religious tradition or not provided for through a religious tradition or group). Schools that were now under the direct control of the LA had sole responsibility for the design, provision and assessment of RE for their pupils. Within this context, it was understood that RE had as part of its provision spiritual development as a central concern of the curriculum and delivery of the syllabus and its extended concerns. This was thought to exceed the formal curriculum but should also be manifested through activities and subsidiary provision. The advantage of this approach is that the diversity of communities could be best served through designing and delivering a curriculum which reflected the communities from which the pupils were based and providing them with a sense of community identity and allegiance (Education Act 1944, 2.23-30).

The years between 1945 and the 1988 Education Reform Act saw dramatic social changes which impacted on the educative project of the various governments of the time. Directly following the war, the role of women in society was being redefined. From being central contributors to Britain's survival during Second World War, women went from being contributors to the workforce to being back in the role of domestic and family figures. The impact of this was a direct concern of the feminist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. New arrivals from former colonies such as the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948 came to be seen as a defining moment in English cultural and social history, as new arrivals (mainly Christian) impacted and influenced cultural, religious and social trends which were not indigenous in character but had a 'birthright' claim to settling in the 'motherland'. Alongside of this, arrivals from the Indian subcontinent to populate the workforces of industrial hubs mainly in the north of England brought a population of important numerical size into established indigenous English communities who were not only not Anglican or Christian but who came from a variety of different religious traditions. Arising out of this was an awareness that education in general but RE in particular needed to be re-focussed and redefined to reflect the changing character and concerns of the society, which has been largely homogeneous in character, to one of multi-cultural and multi-faith in parts of the country that had economic influence and social capital.

A gradual move away from LAs having control over Religious and Spiritual Education in locally maintained schools during the intervening years between 1944 and what became one of the central concerns of the 1988 Education Reform Act was to allow individual schools to oversee the provision of these subject and learning areas for their own pupils rather than having to be in line with an overarching concern of their respective LAs (Education Reform Act 1988, 1.6–9). By allowing schools to be in direct control, the 1988 Education Reform Act hoped to recalibrate subjects which influenced a sense of individual identity and contributed towards community cohesion to reflect a more diverse representation of the communities throughout the country. A formal acknowledgement of the subtle differences in which spirituality was assumed to form part of RE was manifested in the Ofsted Inspection Framework 1992: no longer was it assumed that RE as taught in schools contained spiritual education/development as part of its aims and objectives. This could be said to be because within maintained schools, which may or may not have a particular religious character or demographic, that spirituality and the conception and expression of it would be shared among the school community. As such, Ofsted revised how SMSC education would, from then on, be assessed alongside that of RE. The Ofsted Inspection Framework also made explicit a separation between what Ofsted considered as intellectual development and that of spiritual and personal development. This was with particular regard to SMSC but also extended to areas of school life which lay outside of the formal curriculum. The implications of this are still present today across the National Curriculum and education provision in general. This has been further developed with a revision of the inspection guidance, which exhibits a vagueness on what Ofsted understand to be evidence pertaining to spiritual development in children and again separates the spiritual development from the rigour attached to other subjects (Ofsted Inspection Framework, 2013, Section 153). Interwoven with the current context in schools concerning spirituality and religion, particularly in maintained/non-faith schools, is a situation where the teachers themselves reflect the current state of religion and spirituality that is present in society in general (Woodhead & Catto, 2012). A decrease in formal church attendance alongside a more subjective view of the worth, value and place of religion and spirituality on an individual basis informs and influences the exposure of children and staff to formal and informal opportunities to encounter and explore religion and spirituality.

LA influence over schools' provision of RE has developed over time and is now in a position of having to contend with many iterations of RE being delivered across varying school types, many of whom are not answerable to the LA for their provision of RE and SMSC. The increase of schools types

outside of the purview of LA control of RE such as Academy schools, Free schools and private schools has, one could argue, ensured a variety of RE perspectives and syllabuses to cater for the diverse communities in which these schools are present. However, this has inadvertently allowed for RE provision and SMSC delivery and focus to be out of line in regard to consistency of concern, planning, teaching and assessment in England. The multiplicity of ways in RE is now designed and delivered has complicated the ways in which the teachers of these subjects understand and teach the subject. Rather than a consistent approach, RE has become a victim of a localised approach to this area of the curriculum, the result being that standards have suffered as a result of a lack of clarity of purpose regarding the subject among teaching professionals themselves. Within schools which are still accountable to the LAs in which they are based, RE curricula are provided for schools designed and constructed by bodies within LAs tasked with the job of constructing curricula which reflect the communities in which they are present but broad enough in scope to reflect some of the diversity present within England.

Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) are a legally required body present in all LAs. SACREs, being made up of educators, faith leaders, subject leads and specialists, could be thought of as being perfectly placed to design curricula appropriate to their contexts. However, because they are different across every LA throughout the country, the provision provided by them varies in scope and quality. The result being further lack of clarity in the purpose of RE as well as competing truth claims in regard to the spiritual component present in individuals and society. RE curriculum and coverage falling outside of the National Curriculum has prompted Ofsted to provide a definition of RE which hopes to make clear the scope of the subject, regardless of the school type and location in which it is being delivered. In Ofsted's (2013) report, 'Religious Education, realising the potential' it states that:

Religious education (RE) should make a major contribution to the education of children and young people. At its best, it is intellectually challenging and personally enriching. It helps young people develop beliefs and values, and promotes the virtues of respect and empathy, which are important in our diverse society. It fosters civilised debate and reasoned argument, and helps pupils to understand the place of religion and belief in the modern world.

As the definition shows, what is to be covered and to what degree is left at the discretion of the LA's SACRE which designs, administers, supervises and

reports back on RE to LAs within maintained schools in a local area. Unlike any other area, apart from SMSC, what exactly is to be taught, when and in what depth is unique to a local area but hoped that it will contribute to the overall perceived local/national identity and value systems.

SMSC, again unlike any other area of study within schools, is left to the discretion of the school body and to a large extent is in the hands of individual teachers, with the traditions of the school and the vision of the governing body and head teacher as chief architects assisting in the development of these areas of learning. The National Curriculum of 2014 does not include any aspect of SMSC, but through Ofsted's (2014) recent inspection framework, it is assumed that aspects of SMSC will be observable, not only through teaching activities but in classroom and school culture and as well as the ethos of the school as a whole.

When considering how well the school promotes pupils' SMSC, inspectors should take into account the impact of the range of opportunities provided for them to develop their self-esteem and confidence. (Ofsted, 2014, p. 37)

There is a clear link between RE and SMSC from the above definitions; that the fostering of positive attitudes within pupils is paramount. Aside from this common theme, there are some very obvious differences. While what is to be covered in RE is not stipulated explicitly, there is an expectation that pupils will learn about major world faiths. This does make RE more similar to other humanities subjects in that this subject coverage provides a syllabus from which pupils can learn from an etic perspective, the religious beliefs, traditions and spiritualities of others (Brown et al., 2012).

PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Despite the possibility of a range of coverage in RE and SMSC, educators have sought to define pedagogical approaches which not only reflect the perspectives of the practitioners adopting them whatever the context, but that they also provide the basis from which quality provision can be provided. The challenges of this with particular regard to religious belief and how that may be manifested through conceptions of spirituality are one of the many issues which challenge educators. Depending on their religious tradition and how that tradition considers, defines and sets the parameters around what is and is not spiritual, pedagogy in these areas of the curriculum and from the perspectives of practitioners differs greatly from other subjects and disciplines.