BUILDING LEARNING POWER, EXISTENTIAL THINKING AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Education

College of Social Sciences

University of Birmingham

June 2021

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Abstract

RE as personal or human development is one of several models used in the teaching of RE (NATRE, 2021). This model advocates an approach to Religious Education (RE) in which students, through the study of existential questions, are encouraged to engage in what Michael Grimmitt (1987) refers to as a 'dialectical relationship' between the student's own religion or worldview and those of others. In RE as personal development students are encouraged not only to *learn about* but also *from* the religious material studied and use it, as appropriate, to enrich their own religious views, or to use as a 'critical filter' for their own developing beliefs and values. Put another way, the aim of RE as personal development is to encourage students to develop their existential thinking. A range of strategies exist to encourage student reflexivity, and for some simply being exposed to the views of others is enough to facilitate some form of personal engagement. However, for others more is needed to tackle the apathy and disinterest shown towards the RE and encourage more student buy-in.

This study explores how the explicit teaching of Building Learning Power (BLP) in an RE curriculum may help student buy-in to the subject more and support them to become better existential thinking in RE. My research questions are:

How does explicit teaching of learning habits support the development of existential thinking in Religious Education?

- Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?
- Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?
- How does this exploratory study of the impact of learning habits on the students' development of existential thinking translate into conclusions for the pedagogy of RE today?

To investigate whether a learning-powered RE curriculum could enable better existential thinking I carried out a year-long curriculum intervention in which I delivered an RE curriculum in which the teaching of learning habits was explicit. I collected and analysed a selection of data from the intervention which included student questionnaires, interviews, student written work and field notes. My findings suggest that the use of learning habits in an RE curriculum did seem to play a role in enabling many of the students to engage more in their own learning in RE and develop their existential thinking. The learning habit of metacognition, in particular, played a role in the development of student self-reflection, and the teaching of empathy created more interest in learning about the views of others and for some, even promoted personal views to change.

Dedication

To Richard and Rose x

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has supported me with this endeavour but special mention needs to go to the following people.

Dr Geoff Teece for his initial encouragement and inspiration.

My supervisor Professor Michael Hand who has patiently guided me through this process.

For all the children who took part in the curriculum intervention and especially those who agreed to be interviewed.

To Costa Coffee for all the hours I inhabited their premises.

To my lovely sister-in-law Megan for all her help and advice.

Lastly, to my husband Richard, for all his love, patience and support (and champagne) and to my daughter Rose (*pssst*… I have finished!).

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List of abbreviations

BLP	Building Learning Power
BOS	Bristol Online Survey
CCSR	Consortium of Chicago School Research
CLT	Cognitive Load Theory
CoRE	Commission on Religious Education
CRE	Critical Religious Education
DfE	Department of Education
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EEF	Education Endowment Fund
ELLI	Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory
G3	Generation 3 (learning to learn)
G4	Generation 4 (learning to learn)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMI	Her Majesty’s Inspectors
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
L2L	Learn to Learn
LEA	Local Education Authority
LPA	Learning Powered Approach
NSCL	National College of School Leadership
P4C	Philosophy for Children
PHE	Public Health England
PSHCE	Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.
RE	Religious Education
REC	RE Council of England and Wales
RS	Religious Studies
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SMSC	Spiritual, Moral, Social, Cultural
SOW	Scheme of work
TASC	Thinking Actively in a Social Context
TLO	The Learning Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WCTA	West Coast Teaching Alliance
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Glossary

Building Learning Power	BLP is a L2L method first advocated by Guy Claxton, as a way to help students become better, independent learners through the creation of a metacognitive learning environment which systematically develops a range of learning habits.
RE as personal development	Based on Michael Grimmitt's Human Development model for RE. RE as personal development seeks to develop student existential thinking and reflexivity through the study of religion and worldviews.
Existential Thinking	Existential thinking is the engagement with ultimate or big questions of life which involves some personal or emotional investment in the questions and answers generated.
Metacognition	Metacognition is the awareness of ones thoughts and processes used to plan, monitor, and assess understanding and performance. It is to understand yourself as a learner and know your strengths and weaknesses. It involves the development of three skills - Self-monitoring, self-evaluating, and self-regulation. BLP is one method to do this.
Learning Habits	Learning habits are capacities which underpin subject learning such as the ability to listen, persevere and reason.
Essentialism	This term is used in two related ways in this study. 1. To emphasises the importance of learning a body of knowledge. 2. To essentialise religion by ascribing only positive qualities.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The personal or human development aim is widely accepted as one possible guiding principle for teaching and learning in Religious Education (RE). This approach advocates personal learning where the study of religion encourages the students to learn from specifically selected religious content chosen because of its potential to be life enriching. This is not a confessional approach to RE but one in which the idea of personal development is where students are encouraged to engage with existential questions and self-reflection, and to be willing, where appropriate, to amend their views. RE as personal development therefore aims to encourage student to engage with and development their existential thinking. The issue with this model, however, is its practical implementation: there are several strategies suggested of how to relate the religious content to the life of the students but there is very little which directly addresses how a student can be encouraged to engage with these materials in the first place. Building Learning Power (BLP) is a practical strategy aimed at developing learning in all subject areas; however, as it also addresses the 'person of the learner' through the development of independent learning and metacognition, the question is could it also provide the missing strategy needed to encourage student engagement in RE as personal development.

1.2 RE as Personal Development

This notion of RE as a way to contribute to the personal development of the students is seen as early as the 1870 Education Act, while a century later in the more inclusive 1970s, a style of RE emerged which sought to reflect the diversity of religious belief and practice rather than confessional instruction. The PD element could be seen, for instance, in the phenomenological model of RE as developed by the *Schools Council Lancaster Secondary RE Project* which was influenced by the work of Ninian Smart. This model was developed by the *Schools Council Working Paper Number 36* (1971) and advocated a secular rationale for RE which promotes both academic and personal forms of knowledge and understanding. This emphasis on personal forms of knowledge was a crucial aspect of Smart's view; he argued that the study of religion should involve the use of 'empathy and imagination', that is, the student should be encouraged to try and see the world from the perspective of the people they are studying. He goes on to point out that this not to say that the individual should accept or reflect everything they encounter but that they should be open, as appropriate, to allowing the perspectives they encounter to challenge their views and assumptions (Smart, 1973, p76).

It is therefore possible to trace the element of personal development in the ongoing pedagogical aims of RE through the decades and continuing today. The legacy of the phenomenological approach can still be seen in agreed syllabuses across the UK, however, the 'academic knowledge' rather than the personal knowledge was emphasised by many RE professionals as it was much easier to teach. The personal knowledge suffered from a lack of pedagogical strategies to enable the empathy and imagination occur which meant the phenomenological model did not lead to a curriculum which engaged with any personal

knowledge and understanding but one which often over-emphasised the acquisition of religious knowledge and facts (Grimmitt, 2000b, p28).

Despite - and because of - the phenomenological model for RE, there were other attempts to prioritise the personal development of the students over a factually laden curriculum. This can be seen in Goldman's *Readiness for religion* (1965) and Loukes' *Teenage Religion* (1962) who directly influenced what was termed the *implicit* approach in RE. The implicit approach as opposed to the explicit one aimed to develop a student's spirituality and reflection skills. Unfortunately, this often led in many schools (particularly primary) to a style of RE which was completely devoid of religious content and instead emphasised the personal and spiritual.

The personal development model of RE as envisioned by Michael Grimmitt arose from attempts to reconcile the implicit and the explicit (knowledge) forms of RE. In the *Christians Today Project,* Grimmitt and Read (1975) aimed to consider human experience from both a religious and personal perspective and as part of a common shared experience reflect upon the questions generated and the answers given. There work influenced Grimmitt's latter publication *Religious Education and Human Development* (1987) and the *Westhill Project* (1986, 1992). It is from this background that Grimmitt and Read coined the phrases 'Learning about religion' and 'Learning from religion', which were introduced as pedagogical aims for RE, as a means to enable the students' experiences and views to be linked to that of religion. It was envisioned that to avoid the extremes of both the implicit or explicit models of RE, lessons would include both attainment targets to include both religious knowledge and understanding

(learning about) and more personal forms of learning (learning from). These two aims for RE were included as attainment targets by the SCAA non-statutory model syllabuses (1994) and were adopted widely by the Agreed Syllabus Conferences. They also appeared in the QCA non-statutory National Framework for RE (2004), but only 'learning about' appears in the more recent Commission for RE Report (2018).

The issue with using these attainment targets, Grimmitt later argues, is they were transplanted into curriculum frameworks which had more than one agenda, and where personal development was not at its centre. As such, the 'learning about religion' aspects of the lessons did not always elicit a 'learning from' response. In turn, this led to some teachers trying to fit the religious perspective to the lives of the students which was not always very successful, were often superficial and could lead to a distortion of the religious belief or practice being taught (Grimmitt, 2000b, p37).

RE as personal development aims not to reduce religion to the experience of the student, but to enable the student to be enriched by their experience of religion (Grimmitt, *et al.* 1991). This approach to RE is neither an attempt to indoctrinate the student in any particular view, nor is it about presenting all religions as true, but it is an open and inclusive approach to RE which aims to enable students to 'learn from religion' through engagement with key existential questions. The educational value of this model for RE is not just about understanding the meaning of religious views and beliefs, but also to see how these meanings can help students

to an understanding of self, or to develop the student's ability to reflect on their own patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviour.

There have been several suggested pedagogical procedures for enabling RE as personal development, such as Grimmitt’s Depth Themes, the Westhill Project and Teece’s skilful means. All the approaches emphasised the importance of choosing content which had the potential to enrich the lives of the students. However, what these strategies did not take into account was how student engagement in the classroom can be affected by many other variables. For example, in RE the content being taught often has to contend with student, and indeed parental, attitudes, backgrounds and beliefs which are not always helpful or positive. So, no matter how relevant the subject material, it was not always enough to motivate the students to engage with the ideas and views presented. In short, what could be done to directly address student buy-in to the learning process to enable better existential thinking? I here introduce the essential elements of this pedagogical concern with reference to Building Learning Power.

1.3 Building Learning Power (BLP)

Learning Power is a learning theory aiming to help students to develop the habits and attitudes needed to be independent learners. This is encouraged through the explicit teaching and development of learning habits (sometimes also referred to as skills, dispositions or attitudes) such as questioning, collaboration and managing distractions. A hallmark of a Learning Power

style lesson is a 'dual-focus' in which learning habits are developed alongside specific subject content.

Much has been written about how the development of learning habits and other similar metacognitive strategies can help with academic learning, however, there is comparatively little on the use of learning habits and their role in the more affective and spiritual development of the students. What there is offers a tantalising vision of what could be possible if the learning habits were to be used in this way. For example, Guy Claxton's description of Learning Power as a form of secular proto-Buddhism gives it some spiritual credentials. Claxton goes on to say that true Buddhism is about being first and foremost a powerful learner who is attentive, open-minded, inquisitive, self-aware and willing to take a second look at your own beliefs (2012, p762). Deakin-Crick and Jelfs also suggest in their research project that Learning Power is a 'spiritually grounded pedagogy' (2011, p3). These observations led me to question whether Learning Power could bridge the gap between the subject content and the students' ability and skills in RE and the willingness to engage with the process. Key to my research is the view that in the literature on RE as personal development there is a focus on the content that can be studied, but not so much on how to engage the students in this learning process.

The tantalising hints at the fruitfulness of metacognitive pedagogical approaches to the teaching of RE can be found primarily with reference to Grimmitt's work. For example, Grimmitt is clear in *Religious Education and Human Development* (1987) that the content chosen to be studied in RE should be based on the existential and pedagogical needs of the

students themselves. He argues that the content should have ‘the potentiality of opportunity for reflection on, and re-evaluation and reinterpretation of the self’ and this will only occur if the material chosen mirrors the needs of the students (1987, p206). The lesson content and some suggestions about how it may be taught are outlined at length in what Grimmitt calls the ‘Adolescent Life-World and Religious Life-World Curriculums’. However, beyond these extensive lesson suggestions, which can be found in the latter half of his *Religious Education and Human Development*, (*ibid,* pp267ff), there are no further lesson materials or resources to facilitate this interaction between the religious content and the student’s world views; the teacher is left to lift and/or adapt what is there. Grimmitt does go on to talk about the ‘skills and abilities’ that can be gained from their study of religion and how they can apply this to their understanding of their own situations and experiences. He even mentions the possible development of more general abilities such as the ability to observe, to make connections, to abstract and analyse, to ask questions, knowing how to seek further information and to think logically (*ibid,* p20). However, these abilities and skills are seen as a by-product of the students' encounter with religion; their development is not a contributing factor to this encounter.

The lack of facilitation between the students’ viewpoint and the religious content studied also appears in Grimmitt’s later work on human development: he talks about how all religious traditions, content or phenomenon have the power to give all students, religious or not, a spiritual and educational ‘gift’ and that these ‘gifts’ cannot be pre-determined but emerge as part of the students’ interaction with the religious material (Grimmitt, *et al.* 1991, p82ff). He goes on to claim that teaching RE in this way also contributes to the development of competences which in his view have ‘particular significance to the development of spiritual

awareness'. For example, Grimmitt cites questioning and imagining as part of the primary curriculum but also (suggested as part of the secondary curriculum) evaluating and 'personal decision making' (*ibid,* p88). However, the development of these competences (skills/abilities) are treated as a by-product of the interaction between the student and the religious material. The question has to be asked if, as Grimmitt argues, these competences 'have a particular significance to development of spiritual awareness' then why are they not highlighted much more as part of the learning process than they are? Why are the learning competencies not taught/developed in themselves?

Kincaid also criticises Grimmitt for the lack of what he terms as 'active learning experiences' to promote personal development. He points out that however appropriate the content, the students are less likely to develop in 'self-knowledge' if active teaching and learning strategies are not employed in RE. Here Kincaid is specifically referring to the use of activities which actively engage the students in their own learning (1991, pp70-71). What I am suggesting for RE as personal development goes further than Kincaid's approach, putting more of an instrumental and participatory role on the development of learning habits (or competencies) which underpin any learning activity a student may engage with in RE. The development of these learning habits may in turn also encourage more students to engage more actively with RE and help them develop their ability to think existentially.

1.4 My Interest

I am a secondary RE teacher in a converter academy which was judged as outstanding by Ofsted and I have taught the subject as a main scale teacher and subject leader for two decades. The importance of 'learning about and from religion' was instilled in me as part of my teacher training; however, I have no recollection of ever being told about the origins of these terms, or about any controversy within the subject as to the nature and aims of RE. As such, from the start of my career, it was important to include both 'learning about' and 'learning from religion' in all lessons. However, from the beginning I struggled with the practical application of the 'learning from' approach. At the time (and I am sure this is still practised in many schools), the way to do 'learning from' was to find an angle from which to connect the students' lives to the views and beliefs being taught. This approach could work, but more often than not, as already pointed out; the links made were superficial at best and at worst could lead to a distortion of religious belief and practice. I was also dissatisfied with the content being delivered to the students, which although thematic in nature, were very phenomenological and included topics such as places of worship, festivals and founders which by their very nature limited the way in which religion was presented and did not always have a lot to offer students other than fact finding.

During my M.Ed. I became aware of the work of the Westhill Project and Grimmitt and Teece on the human or personal development aim of RE which led me to focus more on how exactly the 'learning from' attainment target for RE could be achieved meaningfully in the classroom. Despite the classroom strategies suggested by Grimmitt and Teece, I still found the 'learning from' element of my lessons difficult to deliver and I was keen to find a potential solution.

More recent debates in the world of RE have also focused on the issues of knowledge and worldviews, where pedagogies of RE, such as RE as Personal Development, have been criticised for essentialising religion, being sentimental and uncritical. As part of my research I aim to respond to some of these issues, and show that RE as personal development is still a relevant model of RE.

In my current role as a Leader of Learning, I have responsibility for PSHCE and development of learning habits across the school curriculum. My first encounter with Building Learning Power came about when, along with some other colleagues, I attended a two-day training course specifically designed to help us become BLP advocates in school. The origins of my research occurred during this training when I began to reflect on the similarities between BLP and RE as personal development. Learning Power is based on a student-centred approach to learning in which the subject content is used to enable the development of learning habits. RE as personal development is also based on a student-centred approach through which the religious content, although taken seriously, is taught as a means to an end. Learning Power based teaching aims to help young people cope with the complexities of life, and RE as personal development offers insight from different faiths and philosophies on many complex issues of life and questions of ultimate concern. It was from this basis that I began to explore the ideas and values which underpin Learning Power, to unpick the way in which RE as personal development helps students to explore key existential questions and to explore the relationship between the two. It was within this context that I carried out a curriculum intervention with a Year 7 class to explore this possible relationship between Learning Power and RE as personal development.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on my initial interest, I wanted to bring together and explore the potential links between BLP and existential thinking in RE by investigating the question **how does explicit teaching of learning habits support the development of existential thinking in Religious Education?** In other words, in looking for a strategy to try and encourage more student buy-in to the existential content of RE, my main research question involved exploring whether a BLP learning habits framework, taught as an integral part of RE, could encourage this engagement with the existential content of the lessons. As the learning habits are designed to facilitate a metacognitive learning environment, in which the learner is guided in the learning process through the use of learning habits such as to notice details, to question, reason and persevere in their learning, it was envisaged that these metacognitive processes might encourage greater student buy-in, improve their existential thinking and contribute to their overall personal development. In order to support the research of my main question, I address the following three subsidiary questions:

- **Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?** As part of this exploration into the relationship between BLP and the development of existential thinking, it was clear that, as with any group of people, not all students would respond in the same way. Therefore to assess the success of the learning habit RE curriculum on existential thinking, it was important to explore how the students responded positively, negatively and indifferently, what possible reasons there could be for any differences or similarities in response, and whether certain groups of students responded better than others.

- **Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?** I had suspected from the beginning of my research that there could be a close relationship between the learning habits and what it is to engage in existential thinking due to the personal, introspective nature of both ideas. If the relationship existed, I had to consider whether some learning habits were better at developing existential thinking than others, and, linking back to the first subsidiary question, whether some habits were better or worse in supporting the development of existential thinking for differing students.
- **How does this exploratory study of the impact of learning habits on the students' development of existential thinking translate into recommendations for the pedagogy of RE today?** As a small scale study, the question of generalisability is an important one: how far could the findings of this study be applicable to other school and educational settings? As an exploratory study, I was investigating whether the BLP learning habits could support the development of existential thinking in RE, but how far would my research have any application outside of my context? Was it reproducible? Could any recommendations be made for RE pedagogy today?

1.6 Overview of study

In this chapter I have explored the background to the personal development model for RE: I have outlined why I believe BLP could be useful to RE as personal development, and I have explained my personal motivation for this study.

This study is divided into ten chapters: the first four review the relevant academic literature and provide the rationale for the research.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the development and rationale behind the personal development approach to RE, with particular emphasis on the work of Grimmitt and Teece. This chapter also outlines and responds to some of the objections made against the approach, and where it fits with the more recent issues in RE such as worldviews and the knowledge problem. The chapter finishes by highlighting the need for a pedagogical approach to encourage student buy-in to this approach of RE.

Chapter 3 explores the origins and rationale behind the Building Learning Power approach to learning; it outlines how BLP links to and draws strength from other educational theories and establishes that BLP is one of several metacognitive learning approaches. The chapter also explains the support for BLP and similar metacognitive learning strategies and responds to some of the main objections to the BLP-like approaches. The chapter finishes by suggesting that BLP, as an example of a metacognitive learning strategy, could also help enable students to engage with the existential nature of RE as personal development.

Chapter 4 explains the rationale for equating RE as personal development with existential thinking rather than spiritual development or awareness. The qualities and personal attributes required for a student who is deemed to be a good existential thinker are explained, and the chapter finishes by showing how BLP could help develop existential thinking.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of methodological issues including the aims of the research, an explanation of the research design chosen, the role of the teacher researcher, data analysis and ethical considerations. The rationale of the curriculum intervention is also addressed which includes the markers for development in existential thinking and an explanation of how the BLP learning habits are integrated to the RE curriculum.

Chapters 6 to 9 present and discuss the data generated by this research project.

Chapter 6 presents the most relevant findings from the two student questionnaires conducted at the beginning and end of the research intervention. From the questionnaires, with reference to the markers of existential thinking, I suggest that for some students the teaching of the learning habits may have supported their development in existential thinking.

Chapter 7 looks at the findings from the two student interviews conducted at the beginning and end of the research intervention. I give an overview of some of the comments made, and in the second interview their comments on the learning habits. With reference to the markers for development in existential thinking, I suggest that the learning habits may have supported some of the interviewees in their development.

Chapter 8 looks at the written output from the students and the field notes taken during and after each lesson, some of which shows evidence of a deeper engagement with the existential questions studied. The references in learning diaries and comments in the lessons themselves

also show that the students felt that the specific teaching of the BLP learning habits, and especially that of empathy, were influential on their attitudes and output.

Chapter 9 uses all data sources to show a case study of five student representative of the differing reactions to the curriculum intervention. Two of the case studies, Stephen and Martha both demonstrate obvious changes in the attitude and engagement with existential questions, and Stephen and Ada name empathy as a particular learning habit which made a difference to them. However, the curriculum intervention had the least effect on Leo.

Chapter 10 is a discussion of the findings in which it is suggested that the BLP learning habits can support development in existential thinking, and the learning habits of empathy, metacognition and revising may be especially an important for this.

Chapter 11 concludes the study by providing a synthesis of the main findings. The limitations and implications for future research are outline, and recommendations for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER 2:

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

RE as personal development is one of several models for the teaching of RE, however, unlike other aims for RE such as promoting social cohesion, or the acquisition of religious knowledge and understanding, RE as personal development is not only (in my view) the discipline's most important element, but also the least understood, and hence it is often misrepresented by the RE community at large. By giving a brief account in this chapter of the origins and development of this understanding of the nature and role of RE in secular, state education, I can focus on the pedagogical approaches where they have been both recognised but also misunderstood or overlooked. I will therefore particularly consider the importance of the pedagogical approaches of RE in the work of Michael Grimmitt (1973, 1975, 1987, 1991, 2000a,b) and Geoff Teece (2005, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2011, 2013). I will also go on to show how the aim of RE as personal development continues to evolve even in light of more recent debates over the nature and aims of RE and why, despite criticism, it is still a desirable educational aim for the subject.

2.2 Phenomenological, Explicit, Non-Confessional and Multicultural Religious Education

Developed in the 1960s and 70s the phenomenological model for RE was created in response to the need for a non-confessional, inclusive approach to RE which included other world religions. This new approach, first advocated by Smart and the *Schools Council Working Paper*

Number 36, argued that theology was no longer a suitable vehicle in which to deliver religious understanding in a secular context. Instead, a form of RE which did not advocate any particular view-point should be promoted (1971, p37ff). Smart applied the techniques of phenomenology to religion which gathered 'data from the history, theology, social and political contexts and psychology of religion, as well as direct observation' (Kakve, 1996, p182). This led to the classification of religion into six (later seven) dimensions: ritual, mythical, experiential, doctrinal, social, ethical and later also material which led to the teaching of RE according to these dimensions (Smart 1968; 1989).

Despite this new secular rationale for RE Smart argues that the study of religion 'must transcend the informative' 'by being a sensitive induction into religious studies, not with the aim of evangelising but with the aim of creating certain capacities to understand and think about religion' (1968, p97, p105). By using the tools of scholarship a student can 'enter into an empathic experience of the faith of individuals and groups' (Schools Council, 1971, p21) which is vital for the observer in order to appreciate the 'passionate commitment' felt by adherents. This is, Smart argues, is made possible through the 'human power of imaginative self-transcendence' where the onlooker comes to experience an eidetic vision where they understand the significance and meaning of the religion they have observed and can appreciate the power of religion for the believer (Schools Council p23ff). In the classroom, students were to be encouraged to engage with the beliefs they are studying by trying to imagine like what it might feel like to be, for example, a Hindu participating in Puja or a Muslim on Hajj. To do this, the student would be encouraged to suspend or 'bracket out' their personal

beliefs and values to engage in describing the phenomena they experience (Smart, 1973, p33ff).

Regardless of Smart's intention for his phenomenological approach to include both academic and personal forms of knowledge, in practice it never fully achieved its intended aims. Grimmitt comments that, due to a lack of pedagogical procedures, many teachers did not understand the subtleties of the phenomenological approach. The model became so distorted and misrepresented that it became a 'byword for a narrowly descriptive and content-centred approach to RE' (2000b, p28). The approach was also criticised for being uncritical and pluralistic: Wright (1993, 1997, 2003, 2007) accuses those who adopted the approach of indulging in a hermeneutic of romanticism which distorts religion by treating all as having equal value, whereas in his view RE ought to be dealing with truth claims. Barnes in a similar vein accuses phenomenology of proselytising a 'liberal protestant doctrine that different religions are complementary and independently valid revelations of the divine acting to save humankind'. He also points out that this approach to RE did little to challenge religious intolerance and discrimination' (2011, p69).

2.3 Integration of Implicit and Explicit Religious Education

I have briefly touched upon the nature and purpose of RE in England in order to locate and ground my particular focus on the pedagogical approaches tentatively and tantalisingly first evidenced in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Despite, and because of, the criticisms of Neo-Confessionalism or Implicit RE, as introduced in section 2.3 above, attempts were made

in the 1970s and 1980s to integrate the implicit, or experiential RE, more successfully into the phenomenological model.

An attempt to reconcile the implicit and explicit forms of RE can be seen in Grimmitt's 1973 *What can I do in RE?* in which he argues that in the state sector only non-confessional RE is 'educationally valid in a pluralist, multi-racial and multi-cultural society'. It is not the role of schools, he continues, to 'instruct' children in faith or a particular ideology but schools do have 'the responsibility of educating children in Religion and Religious Understanding' (*ibid* p22). This rationale for the subject fits, he claims, with Peters' (1966, p45) educational criterion for the inclusion of any subject in the curriculum:

1. Does the subject incorporate a unique mode of thought and awareness that is "worthwhile" for a person's understanding of self and human life?
2. Does the subject widen and deepen the student's perspective in a unique and valuable way and so contribute to human development?
3. Can the subject be taught in ways that ensure understanding and foster the child's ability for independent thought? (Grimmitt, 1973, pp 9-10).

Grimmitt is also critical of the phenomenological approach to RE presented by Smart and the Lancaster Project, stating that the model did not necessarily allow for point three of Peter's educational criterion, that is, the way in which a subject is taught should encourage understanding and independent thought. Grimmitt does not see this criticism as unsurmountable because each of Smart's dimensions of religion (6 at this point) can be applied, in varying degrees, to the life and experiences of a child (1973, p29). A second criticism made by Grimmitt of the phenomenological approach is based on the attitude of the teacher

and their ability to present the varying religious views in a sympathetic and unbiased manner. He argues ‘the need for openness and breadth of vision that the phenomenological approach to RE demands requires an adjustment in attitude on the part of many teachers’ (*ibid*, p31). This adjustment, he adds, may be too difficult for some, especially in a subject which often relies on non-specialist to teachers.

Despite his concerns about the phenomenological model for RE Grimmitt combines the experiential and phenomenological approaches into his 1973 framework for RE. His aim was to build conceptual bridges between the world of the student in the form of Depth, Symbol, Language and Situation Themes (Existential) and that of religion presented by the six phenomenological dimensions of religion (Dimensional) (1973, p49). These bridges are created through an existential analysis: a process of reflection which allows students to develop the ‘skills, sensitivities and perceptions’ needed to enter into the worldview of those with religious commitment (Grimmitt, 2000b, p31). Therefore, in order for a student to develop knowledge in religion and religious understanding, the starting point for learning should be focused on the needs and interests of the students. That is, RE should primarily focus on and examine the existential experiences of the students themselves so that ‘conceptual bridges between their own experiences and what they recognise to be the central concepts of religion’ can be built (1973*,* p46). To develop religious understanding Grimmitt goes on to detail a two-staged framework:

- Level 1, or the existential approach (implicit), draws on the student’s experiences, feelings and acts;
- level 2, or the dimensional approach (explicit), uses the six dimensions of religion to present religious concepts.

Ideally, Grimmitt aimed for both levels to be taught in combination to avoid an impoverished view of religion (*ibid,* p51).

The basis of the existential dimension was what Grimmitt termed as 'Depth Themes'. The subject matter of a depth theme was the immediate experiences of the student which aimed to encourage them to 'look more deeply into this familiar thing; do you see anything about it which you haven't seen before?' (*ibid*, p54). Grimmitt's use of 'depth theme' is based on the theology of Tillich (1948) who said, 'He who knows depth knows God'. This is interpreted by Grimmitt asking people 'to plumb the depths of our "existential" experiences; to get below the surface of life and examine it from the inside, from a position of depth' (1973, p52). In this view, the existential approach should focus on the student experiences as a whole, introduce them to the idea of 'depth experiences' and to explore their own existential experiences. Grimmitt states

> If we can help the child to learn to look into his own existential concepts at depth and then, at the appropriate time, bring religious concepts within the ambit of these experiences, not only will we assist his development of mature, creative religious concepts but also give him the opportunity of assessing their relevance or irrelevance to him (*ibid*, p54)

The aim of the Depth Themes was not to convey a particular religious view but to develop the skill of reflection in depth. Depth Themes could include any topic and were devoid of religious content, giving the opportunity for each student to

> practise the skill of reflecting in his own experiences at depth, develop insight into himself and his feelings…other people and their feelings, [and] insight into

> what constitutes a distinctly human relationship between self and others (*ibid*, p115).

'Depth Themes' such as pets, holidays and homes were then related to what Grimmitt termed 'dimensional' themes based on Smart's six-dimensional analysis of religion. For example, a 'Depth Theme' on awe and wonder could be linked to a 'dimensional' theme on the religious experience of awe and wonder in the lives of great religious leaders such as Jesus or Muhammad' (1973, pp54, 95).

Grimmitt's Depth Theme approach was adopted by several agreed syllabuses but their implementation did not always fulfil the original ideology of the approach to RE. Brine (1984), who evaluated some of the implementation of the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus, notes that many teachers did not understand the distinction between the implicit and explicit or how they could be used to deliver religious understanding. As Teece points out, the implicit/ explicit distinction produced lessons that were either focused on the implicit, excluding all religious content, or focused on the explicit, excluding the spiritual significance of practices and beliefs (1993, p4ff). Bates also comments that for many teachers and students the 'in-depth analysis of common experience does not lead to the discovery of explicit religious ideas or concepts... neither does it assist in any very specific way with their understanding' (1992, p112).

2.4 RE as Human Development

2.4.1 Michael Grimmitt

A shift in the understanding of RE as personal development was made by Grimmitt and Read in the *Christians Today Project* (1975 – 1977). The aims of this project were to consider questions of human experience from both a religious and personal perspective and to look carefully at these shared experiences. Their work built on that developed by Grimmitt in his *What Can I do in RE?* and it was in this context that the concepts of learning about and learning from religion were formed. The insights of this project influenced Grimmitt's later work, articulated in his book *Religious Education and Human Development* (1987) and the *Westhill Project,* 1986 (Grimmitt, 2000b, p34).

In his *Religious Education and Human Development* (1987), Grimmitt articulates his view that for knowledge to be educational it needs to have instrumental rather than merely intrinsic value and that the essential aim of education in general is human development. He states

> any educational rationale for RE that purports to show that the study of religions can contribute to pupils' personal development should be informed by an understanding of those processes by which human beings come to hold beliefs and values and should address itself to those everyday realities which constitute the pupils' 'life-world (*ibid*, p109).

Grimmitt offers a humanistic rationale for RE in which education is seen as the first order activity rather than religion, so education is the prime motivation for the subject with the religious content itself being secondary (Walshe and Teece, 2013, p318). He also claims that in order for RE to make any meaningful contribution to the education of the students they should be given opportunities to explore 'shared human experience', which are experiences common

to both the values and beliefs of the individual and those displayed by the different world religions and 'traditional belief systems' which contain religious responses to these 'shared human experiences' (Everington, 2000, pp190-191). Grimmitt also describes this process as a 'process of humanisation' in which religion is seen as instrumental in the development of emotional and spiritual growth. To understand this, he attempts to explain what it means to be human. In order to do this, he uses the term 'givens' to denote what he defines as 'facts about human life which are constant, irrespective of culture and ideology' (Grimmitt, 1987, p69). One of the 'givens,' Grimmitt conjectures, is the human capacity to hold beliefs by an 'act of faith', and that the 'act of faith' can be of a religious or secular nature (*ibid* pp90ff). The task of school, he adds, is to enrich and extend how a student views the world beyond their own beliefs and experiences. Grimmitt refers to this as their 'repertoire of belief and values responses' and, as part of this, students should engage with differing 'faith responses' (*ibid,* p99). It is this dialectical relationship between the students own personal beliefs, situations, and that presented by religion/s which is where humanisation occurs. He argues

> If human beings are unable to discover and embrace new visions which lie outside their cultural and personal histories, then surely there is little point in education because this is precisely what education is about – helping young people to transcend whatever factors are limiting their growth towards human maturity (1987, p99).

To engage in this process of humanisation the development of the terms 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion' was central. Coined by Grimmitt and Read in 1975, they were conceived as a pedagogical procedure to enable the dialectical relationship between the learner and religion. Learning about religion included what a student learns about religious

beliefs, practices and teaching, but also their learning about the nature of ultimate questions, the faith response to such questions and the meaning of being human inside and outside traditional religion. Learning from religion involves the process by which a student learns about themselves from their study of religion, where from their own experiences they can discern ultimate questions which in turn can lead to greater personal insight and personal knowledge. This process involves two types of evaluation: impersonal evaluation which is being able to distinguish between differing truth claims, practices and values, and personal evaluation which is the process of self-reflection (Grimmitt, 1987, p225ff). In order for this personal evaluation to occur, the content chosen, and the learning experiences designed to deliver this content must engage the students at a personal level to aid the development of self-knowledge. For example, in terms of self-identity: Who am I? Self-acceptance: What am I really like? Self-illumination: Why am I like this? Self-ideal: What/who shall I be? Self-adjustment: Can I change? Self-evaluation: How am I doing?

In order for the student to become cognisant with religious beliefs and ideals and use the insights gained to evaluate their own beliefs and ideals, the 'religious-life worlds' of devotees should be studied juxtaposed with the students' own life-worlds (Grimmitt 1987, p141). To do this effectively attention needs to be made to the structure of the curriculum, it's content and learning strategies so that students develop the skills needed for them to reflect upon, re-evaluate and re-interpret the self. Grimmitt writes

> While seeking to present religions and religious interpretations of life as authentically and accurately as possible, we must learn to harness this with the needs, experiences and questions of young people themselves, especially those which arise from their own search for meaning and identity or which are

> conducive to their recognition of the importance of engaging in such a search (*ibid,* p203).

Grimmitt quotes Musgrove (1982) when he says if what one learns at school is not to 'become inert or forgotten, or just carried about like so much verbal lumber' there needs to be a relationship between the learning and the needs of the students whether in that moment or in the near future. Learning in this manner is seen as a lifelong process and school needs to equip students with 'transferable knowledge, skills and attitudes' (Grimmitt, 1987, p198) and that all subjects should be taught in ways which enable this to occur. Grimmitt argues that all subjects can, or should, contribute to the process of humanisation, but that RE can do this in several distinctive ways:

> Learn about the nature and demands of those inescapable questions which being human poses, and investigate what it means to make a 'faith response' to such questions;
>
> Understand the influence of 'normative' religious beliefs and values upon a culture that regard them as such, and upon human development within that culture;
>
> Discover that learning about other people's beliefs and commitments can contribute to their own self-knowledge and the development of their capacities for personal decision making (*ibid,* pp202-203).

Grimmitt's guiding principle for RE was, therefore, that of humanisation, where the content and teaching strategies best enable a dialectical relationship between the world view of the young person and that presented by religion. To ensure that both the demands of learning

about and from religion are accommodated equally, Grimmitt adopts Jerome Bruner's concept of a 'spiral curriculum' in which topics and issues can be returned to in greater variety, depth and complexity as the student gets older. To this end, Grimmitt outlines more than 120 curriculum units called 'The Adolescent Life-World Curriculum' and the 'The Religious Life-World Curriculum' based on four key areas of study (family, local community, plural society and world-wide community).

The influence of Grimmitt's human development model for RE cannot be underestimated and even today he continues to influence curriculum writers, teachers and academics (see for example, 2018; Cooling, 2020, 2021b; Flanagan 2020; Teece, 2017, Van der Kooij *et al.,* 2017). There are also many Agreed Syllabus' which still retain the 'learning about religion' and from 'learning from religion' attainment targets, and even where they have moved away from these terms they often specify that they have been incorporated into the new aims for RE (see for example, Cambridgeshire SACRE, 2018; Doncaster SACRE, 2019; SACRE Staffordshire, 2016; West Sussex SACRE, 2020).

However, Grimmitt's human development model has suffered from a variety of criticism, many of which are shared with other types of the human development model. This includes the idea that it is promoting a liberal theology and the view that all religions are the same (see 2.5.2 and 2.5.3). Barnes, for example claims that the emphasis which Grimmitt places on the students' concerns can 'leave them absorbed in their own private prejudices' which achieves nothing productive or positive (2007, p165). This may well be true for some students, but

Grimmitt envisaged that the learning process in RE would be a two-way process, an epistemic dialogue between the student and the content they are studying, the student therefore should never been in a position to be 'absorbed in their own private prejudices' but instead be challenged to justify and explain their views in the light of others.

Thompson (2003, 2004) objects to Grimmitt's human development model for RE and others like it by referring to it as a form of 'personal appropriation' contrary to the truths claims of religion as few would consider their faith to have arisen out of personal reflection alone. She also takes issues with the way in which she sees religion being used as a 'means to an end': she points out that most religions would not be happy for young person to 'discard or refashion at will' their deeply held beliefs (2004, p131). This relativistic treatment of religion is also objected to by other critics, such as Kalve (1996) and Wright (1997), who add that human development models of RE encourage students to see their experiences as more important than any of the religious beliefs or practices studied.

Whilst I acknowledge that the relationship between the students experience and views and that of the religion can be skewed too much in favour of the student, Thompson in particular does not acknowledge that RE in a non-confessional context is first and foremost about education and not proselytism, so whilst I agree the RE teacher does have a duty to present the various religious traditions in a way the various religions would recognise, the most important aspect of the lesson is giving the student the opportunity to learn from the ideas

and beliefs presented; what this actual learning looks like is not, and should not be, controlled by the teacher.

I would also argue that RE as human development is actually trying to challenge the students to reflect on their own views in light of what they are learning. Vitally, it is also trying to enable the students to engage with the views of others. Students need to understand that their view is one amongst many. So, rather than diminishing religious beliefs and experiences, the students are encouraged to treat them more seriously. Ultimately, as this is an educational process and not a religious one, the personal development of the students is more important than that of any one faith perspective, however, this does not mean that religious views and experiences are not cherished. If as part of this learning process any 'personal appropriation' occurs this shows that the student is reflecting on what they have learnt and trying to make sense of it for themselves. As Rudge points out, such issues are the price to pay if you want an open and plural system of education and students will, as is human, 'respond to religion in any way they see fit' no matter how religion is presented to them (2000, p104).

In a similar vein, Kalve also criticises Grimmitt from a confessional basis: he argues that responses to ultimate questions cannot be separated from religious faith, and that these responses are metaphysical capacities which derive from, and are directed towards, God (1996, p185). This is disputed by Engebretson who points out that Kalve misses the point: Grimmitt's rationale for RE is humanistic and not theological and in an age in which the place of RE on the curriculum is being challenged by subjects such as PSHE, it is important for

Grimmitt to argue for a secular, multicultural justification for RE. Engebretson also disagrees that the idea of 'metaphysical capacities' is derived from, and is directed towards, God and shows little awareness of the nature of secular spirituality. As Grimmitt argues, seeing religion as synonymous with spirituality is a mistake, as the latter is a fundamental part of what it is to be human; often this capacity is directed towards some sort of metaphysical belief as presented in religions, but this is not always the case, as spirituality can be expressed in a myriad of different ways (2009, p125ff).

2.4.2 The Westhill Project

The Westhill Project and Grimmitt's Human Development model both have their origins in the collaborative work of Grimmitt and Read in the late 1970s. Both share common aims and principles and advocate the instrumental view of religion in RE to enable students to reflect on their own views and values. The project's manual *How do I teach RE?* advocated the use of three interrelated fields of enquiry: 'Traditional Belief Systems', 'Shared Human Experience' and 'Individual Patterns of Belief' from which content for RE lessons could be drawn. To achieve the aim of the project, all three areas needed to be explored in a RE curriculum, and an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the three fields of enquiry needed to be understood. To focus on one area, or to treat all three areas as distinct as opposed to interrelated, would result in a distortion of the project's aims (Read *et al.* 1986, p25).

'Traditional Belief Systems' was a reference to the major world religions and included two key areas of focus: the observable aspects of religion such as family life, community life, public life

and personal life. Also important were the hidden features of religion which are the 'inner core of faith, values and attitudes' which lie behind the observable aspects of religion which included belief and spirituality (*ibid,* p11). To approach traditional belief systems, the project advocated the use of four rules:

- Identify suitable topics.
- Be aware of different perspectives within traditions.
- Aim for an objective, fair and balanced presentation.
- Ensure that a variety of different traditional belief systems are explored (*ibid*, p16).

The project did not make it necessary to teach everything there was to know about a particular faith tradition, as this was impractical, but to focus on the educational value of selected aspects of religion which could be used as a 'catalyst for the personal development of the student' (Rudge, 2000, p94).

'Shared human experiences' are experiences which for many human beings 'have prompted and continue to prompt puzzling or ultimate questions about life' (Read *et al.* 1986, p16). Integral to this field of enquiry are seven human experiences which were chosen because they were felt to be the most likely to generate ultimate questions. These experiences were: the natural world; relationships; rules and issues; stages of life, celebrations; and lifestyles. An example of an ultimate question from shared human experience, which by its very nature raises both religious and non-religious concerns and answers, is 'Why is there suffering?' Through such a question the views of the students can be considered, as well the differing approaches of the religious traditions and philosophies (Teece, 1993, p10).

‘Individual Patterns of Belief’ are those experiences, values and beliefs brought into the classroom from both the students and teachers. This is where personal development may be encouraged through individual reflection and exploration of the material studied. Read *et al.* considered this field of enquiry to be separate from the other two because the personal reflection and any resultant change in views, values or behaviour which occur, may coincide with the views presented by religion and/or society but also may be very individual to the student (1986, p25).

The Westhill Project was not without criticism. Despite the best efforts of the project leaders to produce lesson materials and student textbooks, the three fields of enquiry method required a lot of the teachers involved in its implementation: sensitivity, an awareness of the many nuanced interpretations of the interplay between religion, ultimate questions and everyday life. This requires a specialist approach which might be difficult in schools that rely on non-specialist staff to teach RE. Another issue highlighted by Rudge was that if the aims of the project were for the three areas of the subject to be studied, why is it that some of the subject matter of the materials produced by the Project (such as the picture cards) do not all elicit the ultimate questions of human experience, but only those of a religious nature, thereby a contradiction to the project’s aims, encouraging a more phenomenological approach to thematic RE (2000, p105). Bates also objects to the Project's use of implicit religious ideas as this, in his view, is a product of outdated theological assumptions which have no place in modern Religious Education and should be ‘jettisoned’. He also claims the Project’s advocacy of ultimate questions is also inappropriate as the answers to such questions can be used as an opening for religious inculcation (1992, p116ff). The objection to the inclusion of implicit

religion is a fair point and one which makes a frequent appearance in the literature (Barnes and Wright, 2006; Wright 2000), however, the idea that using ultimate questions could be used for religious inculcation seems to me to be missing the point that ultimate questions can have both religious and non-religious responses and within a state, non-confessional RE, there is no place for inculcation.

2.4.3 Religion as human transformation

Teece develops the insights of The Westhill Project and Grimmitt's Human Development model in a unique way by utilising the theology and philosophy of John Hick. He moves away from the phenomenological type model to form an approach to RE which considers more carefully what he terms as a 'religious understanding of religion'. That is, does RE truly reflect what religion means to those who live and breathe it (2010b, p14). Teece recounts he was first influenced by the theology and ideas of Hick when he picked up a copy of his Gifford Lectures published in 1989 as *An Interpretation of Religion* in which the first paragraph states

> There are many general interpretations of religion. These have usually been either naturalistic, treating religion as a purely human phenomenon or, if religious, have been developed within the confines of a particular confessional conviction which construes all other traditions in its own terms. The one type of theory that has seldom been attempted is a religious but not confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms; and it is this that I shall be trying to offer here (Hick 1989, p1 quoted in Teece, 2010b, p16).

Teece, therefore, advocates a model of RE where the view of religion is religious but not confessional. He comments, that unlike most other curriculum subjects, there are issues with RE's self-understanding – insofar as the phenomenological model for RE is in fact based on a

social scientific view of religion which looks at the effect and development of religion on society and in/on the individual but not what religion is in itself (2010b, pp16ff). He also highlights that the national curriculum documents for subjects such as Geography make it clear how Geography understands the world and what Geography education is, but for RE curriculum documents, such as the National Framework (2004), talk about RE and not religion, for example

> Religious education provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God…' and 'It develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other worldviews that offer answers to questions such as these (QCA, 2004, p7).

Curriculum documents for RE, therefore, often do not make it clear what is distinctive about religion and how it can contribute to the educational agenda in a unique way. Teece reasons one way to solve this issue is to stop seeing religion as an addendum to people's lives but as something which for the believer infiltrates every aspect of their life. Using the ideas of W.C. Smith (1978), Teece writes that religion is for many people a part of what it means to be human and not, as is often presented, an added extra. Smith describes faith for many as an 'orientation to the world' where people live out their lives as a reflection of their beliefs. The separation between religion and everyday life is a modern aberration, a product of the secularisation tendencies of the West, where religion is often seen as an agreement to set of propositions about the world you either ascribe to or not (2010b p14). Strhan (2010), for example, contends that such views distort religion into merely whether you believe something or not which is an overly simplistic view of what religion is. Teece contends that Hick's critical

realist views of religion are useful in this debate: Hick writes that human knowledge of the world is only partial because humans are limited and imperfect. This, he continues, explains why there are different cultural responses to the 'transcendent religious reality' and why a religious interpretation of the world is just as reasonable as a non-religious one which may be more scientific and naturalistic in nature (Teece, 2010b, p86ff).

Key to Teece's view of the purpose of RE is his contention (also based on the work of Hick) that what is distinctive about many post-axial religions (those who were formed or have their origins around 900-200 BCE - teaching an ethic of compassion, love and non-violence, Stolberg and Teece, 2010, p47ff) are their soteriological character, that is, the ability to require spiritual change or growth in the individual. For example, from a Sikh perspective, this would be change or growth from being Manmukh (self or man-centred) to being Gurmukh (God centred). Teece argues it is this 'Irenaean element in Hick's theology which is potentially illuminating for religious education' (2010b p87). Through an analysis of religion, Hick concludes that all include the notion that there is something fundamentally 'unsatisfactory or incomplete' about human nature and that all provide different reasons and solutions to this unsatisfactoriness to allow the believer to become, in the view of a particular religion, more 'truly human'. Teece writes

> For Muslims humans are incomplete because of *ghafala* (forgetfulness of Allah) and for Jews because of *yetzer ha-ra* (humans' innate inclination to do evil in a precarious life where survival is our pre-occupation). For Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists the 'natural' human state is one of *avidya* (ignorance). Misguided by *maya* (illusion) humans are attached to the world of becoming which is *samsara*. For Buddhists such ignorance is the cause of *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) due to *tanha* (craving) (Teece, 2010b, p86).

Therefore, to 'learn from religion', the student needs to look at religion as a vehicle for human transformation (soul-making) or to see the 'power and passion of religion as a force for change' (Maybury and Teece, 2005, p9). This view of RE as human transformation is not a form of confessionalism but is described as 'a religious view of religion' where students can learn from the responses of religious people to questions of 'common human experience'; this, in turn, may help a student to reflect on their own views and awareness of self. It is also argued that a soteriological understanding of religion could help students develop a deeper appreciation of religious belief. Walshe and Teece write

> A soteriological understanding of religion has the potential to transcend a mere conceptual understanding of religion where it can provide a framework within which key religious concepts might be understood. For instance, the concept of sewa is only fully understood when it goes beyond being about service to others and is seen in the context of a Sikh's spiritual development and transformation from self-centeredness to God-centeredness (2013, p323).

Walsh and Teece also emphasise that it is further important for RE teachers to consider how religions are presented to the students: is it done in a way which adherents of a particular religious faith would not recognise or in a way which they would? Learning from religion in this context ought then to be derived directly from the religious material itself and not be an added extra as it often appears in school curricula. What is taught in RE also needs to be considered seriously as well as how it is taught (*ibid,* p100).

Through his use of Hick's religious pluralism Teece is accused by Barnes and Wright of attempting to perpetuate a liberal theological agenda disguised as modern RE. They write

‘what is termed ‘’post-confessional’’ religious education in Britain is a subtle form of liberal Protestant confessionalism’ (2006, p71). He is also accused of encouraging what is termed the romantic hermeneutic of transcendence in which all religions are seen as equally valid (universal theology) which, in turn, undermines the diversity of religious faith. Teece counters many of these criticisms by stating that the promotion of a ‘universal theology’ is not an acceptable basis for RE, and that neither he or Hick have ever said there is such a thing as a common religious experience. Teece argues that seeing religion as human transformation does not mean you have to accept all beliefs and practices as being equally valid, and neither does it preclude the study of religion in a critical way (2005, pp37ff). Teece also adds that organising religion into a curriculum structure inevitably requires some reductionism. Using Proudfoot’s (1985) distinction between descriptive reductionism and explanatory reductionism, he states that descriptive reductionism is not appropriate, as it fails to recognise a religious experience in a way which is identifiable by the religious person, but an explanatory reductionism could be considered as acceptable if it explains the experience in a way which religious believers would recognise and approve of (Teece, 2010a, p99ff). As part of this, Teece claims that it is important for RE teachers to consider how religions are presented to the students, asking whether it is done in a way which adherents of a particular religious faith would recognise, or in a way which they would not. Learning from religion in this context ought therefore to be derived directly from the religious material itself, and not be an added extra as it often appears in school curricula. He states

> learning about myth, ritual and symbolism per se does not, arguably, enable learning about and from to be used in a way that best enables each term to illuminate our understanding and evaluation of the other. This can most effectively be achieved by selecting appropriate content from the religions themselves (2010b,pp177-178)

Teece's use of pluralism is procedural, meaning 'that it informs the process of the subject but does not exclusively define the content' (2005, p37). Pluralism is used as a mechanism in RE to view differing faith perspectives, but it does not teach that all of these views are equally valid, as this would be just as confessional as espousing a particular faith perspective. However, Teece states he is arguing for a kind of 'soft pluralism' (*ibid,* p16) which acknowledges that one can benefit from learning from other faiths.

2.4.4 Religion as skilful means

As with Grimmitt, Teece argues that the religion in Religious Education ought to be seen as having an instrumental value because 'it is education, rather than religion that is the first order activity' (2008, p1). Developing his theme further Teece contends that religion in RE could be seen as *upayic* or 'skilful means' in which the intention is not for indoctrination, but for students to explore what it means to be human through differing faith perspectives (*ibid*, p18). The idea of 'skilful means' has a variety of different interpretations and levels of importance: it can be approached in a narrow manner, where the teacher wants their student to understand a concept or idea, and where in order to do this the teacher uses a variety of methods or skilful means to help the student get to the next level of understanding. In a secular educational context, this is what teachers do all the time: for example, many teachers are aware of and use Vygotsky's social constructivist theory - zone of proximal development (ZPD) - as recounted in *Mind in Society* (1978), in which the teacher designs a series of activities to support the student's understanding from one point to another. However, it is its meaning within a much broader and comprehensive sense often associated with the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, which (again based on the work of Hick) is advocated by Teece as a way

of approaching religious content in RE. Hick (2004) describes this broader meaning as expressing 'a profound insight, excitingly illuminating or deeply disturbing according to one's presuppositions, into the nature of Buddhism, and perhaps also into the nature of religion generally'.

Religion itself is skilful means: a student uses and learns from the teachings and insights of the religion/perspective taught and then when they have learnt something new or made the changes needed to make, they leave the teachings behind. In a Buddhist context the idea here is of impermanence (anicca) that nothing stays the same but in a secular educational one religious knowledge is seen here as instrumental; in that it always leads somewhere else. This broader view of skilful means, which interests Hick, is first seen in the parable of the raft in the Majjhima Nikaya:

> A man coming to a great stretch of water sees that the side he is on is dangerous but the other side safe, and so he wants to cross over. There is no bridge or boat, so he takes branches and grass and constructs a raft and paddles himself over to the other side. Since the raft has been so useful he is tempted to lift it on to his shoulders and carry it with him. What he should do, however, according to the Buddha, is to go on, leaving the raft behind. Likewise the dharma, he says, is 'for carrying over, not for retaining… You, monks, by understanding the Parable of the Raft, should get rid even of (right) mental objects, all the more of wrong ones...' (The Middle Length Sayings).

In terms of Religious Education, the content is seen as a raft (religious teaching/idea) to get the student across the water and when they have made that journey (learnt that lesson or understood/reflected on that insight through being reflective, asking questions, listening) they can leave the raft (teaching) behind. Teece is not saying that RE is *upaya* but that this can serve

as a useful analogy in the delivery of religious content in RE. Religion in this context is to be seen as a vehicle of human transformation, operating as skilful means in the teaching and learning process, where students are given the support and experiences to explore what it means to be human. Teece reasons that, unlike the Buddhist view, there is no expectation that students carry any particular view with them, but if they are religious then learning from other religious traditions may be enriching and for individuals with no religious loyalty it may help them enrich their own world view or even help them to develop one. Teece adds that learning about and from religion can be used as a critical filter for the student to consider the world in which they live and that these experiences, in turn, will also require them to explore religious teachings and practices in a critical manner and assess them against their own developing beliefs and values (Stolberg and Teece, 2010, p51). This process is demonstrated by the following learning cycle (see figure one).

For RE as personal Indeed Teece (2010b) comments that religion should not be 'reduced to the experiences of the student', or that the study of religion should be uncritical or merely about opinion. Students instead should be presented with a view of religion which, for devotees is a perfectly natural 'orientation to the world'; not an add-on to their life, but a legitimate, albeit sometimes controversial, way of looking at the world which, as a human activity is worthy of study.

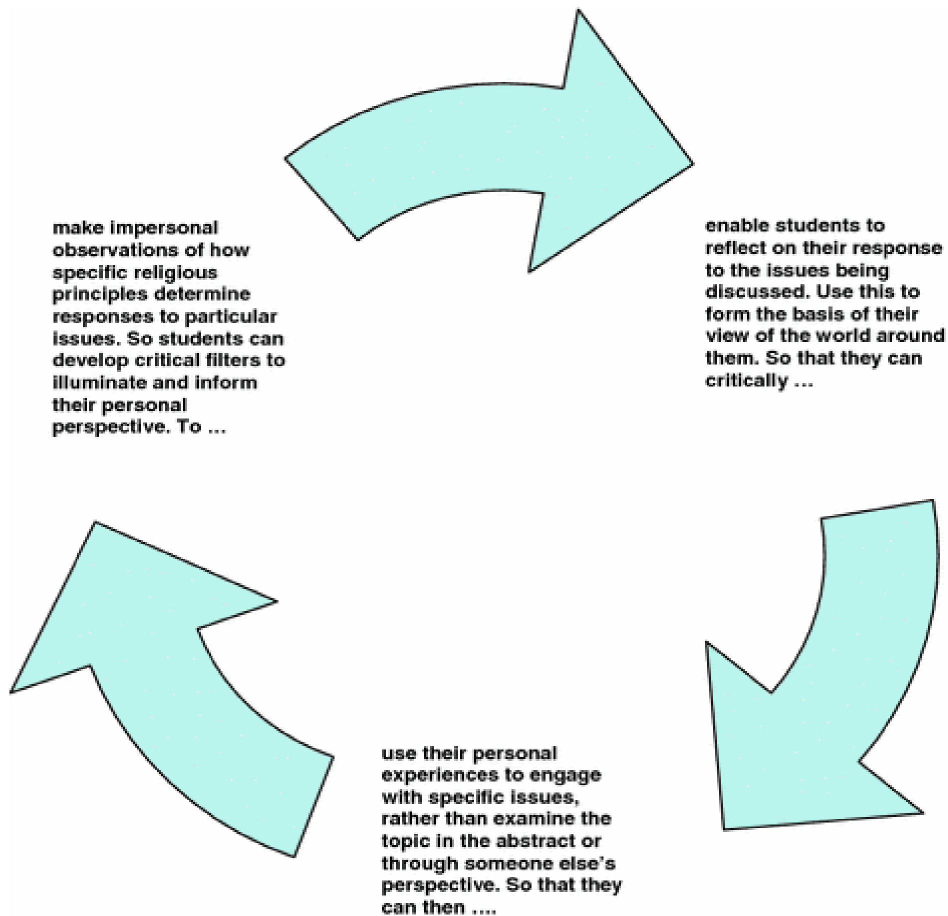


FIG 1: 'LEARNING ABOUT RELIGION' AND 'LEARNING FROM RELIGION' FROM 7:1 IN STOLBERG AND TEECE, 2010, P67

2.5 RE: Worldviews and Knowledge

So far in this chapter I have outlined the origins and development of RE as personal development and have explored the importance of the aim in the work of Grimmitt and Teece. In the following section I address more recent debate on the nature and aims of RE looking particularly at the issues concerning worldviews and knowledge in RE. As part of this overview I aim to show how despite criticism, the RE as personal development aim for RE continues to evolve and develop and is still a desirable aim for RE.

2.5.1 Religion and Worldviews

In 2018 the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) published a report entitled *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward, a National Plan For RE* which proposed a national plan for RE to promote a more 'academically rigorous and a knowledge-rich preparation for life in a world of great religion and belief diversity' (CoRE, 2018, *Forward*). A key element of this 'new thinking' is the use of the term 'worldview' alongside that of 'religion'. A worldview, according to CoRE 'is a person's way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world' (2018, p4); it is an approach or philosophy of life which can affect, for example, the way in which a person acts, their view of reality, their beliefs and values (*ibid,* p.4). Having some form of worldview, CoRE claims is something that all people have whether consciously or not. The existential questions which religious people try and answer are also often the same as many non-religious people may have including, for example, questions pertaining to personal identity, belonging, the purpose of life and the nature of reality (CoRE, 2018, p29).

Using the term 'worldview', according to CoRE, also helps to removes any ambiguity about what the subject is about, in contrast to 'Religious Education' which people assume is about making a person religious (*ibid*, p31). In contrast, CoRE (2018) wants to be clear that Religion and Worldviews is a subject for all, no matter a student's family background, beliefs or practices, and includes a greater variety of perspectives beyond the six major world religions (CoRE, *Forward*). Woodhead (2016) also observes that even though people in the UK may be moving away from traditional religion, this does not mean they are not interested in religion or spirituality: she observes many have their own personal, often syncretic, religious and spiritual views and practices (pp249ff). This concern for diversity and inclusivity in RE also

forms part of the arguments of Van der Kooij *et al* (2017), Dinham and Shaw (2015) and Åhs, Poulter, and Kallioniemi (2019) for the adoption of the term 'worldview' in RE as a more 'encompassing concept' (2019, p172).

The idea of a worldview is interpreted by CoRE in two ways: firstly, as an 'institutional worldview' (sometimes described as an organised worldview), or a view of the world shared by a particular group, such as Christianity or Humanism, which can also form part of an institution (such as the Church of England), and secondly as a 'personal worldview' which is the view of an individual which stands on its own or is influenced by one or several institutional or organised worldviews.

The institutional worldviews CoRE (2018) writes should include the major world religious faiths and depending on a school's context and interests, other groups such as Paganism and Rastafari. In terms of non-religious worldviews they suggest Humanism, secularism and atheism as suitable for study, but acknowledge that what constitutes a non-religious worldview is more difficult to define, as many people do not identify with any particular worldview, and most non-religious worldviews do not have the same structures or features as organised religion. CoRE argues, however, that this does not mean that the term 'worldview' should be shied away from, but that effort needs to be made to find a working definition of the term which reflects greater diversity (CoRE, 2018, p26, p75).

In terms of the personal worldview, CoRE (2018) writes that for a student to develop more refined knowledge of their own worldview they need to be taught how personal and institutional worldviews are formed, and how they interact and change over time. They also need to understand that worldviews are diverse, complex and that it is possible to adhere to a particular view in a variety of different ways (*Ibid,* pp26ff): for some it is about what they do or do not believe in, for others it is about having a particular moral outlook or practice, and/or could be about belonging. Some people may not identify with any specific worldview at all, and CoRE argues that even though this may be the case, worldviews do not have to be conscious and that all people possess one in some form (CoRE, 2018, p74).

CoRE's idea of Religion and Worldviews is seen as so significant that some scholars (see Cooling 2020, 2021a, 2021b) see it as presenting the next paradigm shift in RE to reflect the greater diversity in society, from a World Religions paradigm to that of a Worldviews paradigm (Cooling, Bowie and Panjwani, 2020, pp20ff). Cooling writes that the idea of religion and worldviews offers an new, more inclusive way to think about curriculum design in the subject with a focus now on religions and non-religious worldviews function in human life (2021b, p10).

From its inception, the idea of a religion and worldviews approach to RE is not without criticism. Hand (2012b, 2018) and Barnes (2021), both point out that RE already includes the study of non-religious views such as atheism, particularly in its role as a critic of religion and religious beliefs, and question the need for a new name to describe something already present

in the RE classroom. A major issue with CoRE's use of the term 'worldview' is a lack of conceptual clarity. Schweitzer (2018) observes that while there is a need for curricular reform in RE, it could be achieved 'without taking up the rather ill-defined category of worldviews for renaming the subject' (p521). In a similar vein, Hand (2018) also notes the lack of conceptual clarity from CoRE and writes that changing the name of RE to Religion and Worldviews 'is a deeply unhelpful suggestion'.

The lack of conceptual clarity is acknowledged by advocates of CoRE (see Cooling, 2021b, 2020 and Flanagan, 2020). Cooling (2021b) draws attention to some of the critics of worldviews including Weir (2017) who writes that historically the term worldview was not associated with pluralism or dialogue, but was linked with closed 'tribal ideologies', is resistant to change, and in conflict with other views (Cooling, 2021b, p406). Flanagan also writes at length on the issues with the term 'worldview' and its various interpretations. She comments that the current debates 'reflect, but not yet resolve, historical debates on content or component dimensions, character, or construction and definition of the concept' (2000, p333). However, there is an acknowledgment in the literature (Cooling, 2020, 2021b; Flanagan, 2020; Freathy and John, 2019) that even though the concept of a worldview is a messy concept, and the way in which it is expressed by CoRE is not very clear, it does not mean the term should be dismissed, as it has potential benefits which could be fruitful for educational purposes. Cooling (2020, 2021b) argues rather than focusing on the negative and limiting definitions, there are many more useful fluid and open understandings of the term: Aerts *et al.* conclude that worldviews function as a reference for individual interpretation of the world (2007, p7); Valk (2009, 2021) explains worldviews as both visions of and ways of life, and Sire defines a worldview as

> a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of propositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being (2015, p141).

Cooling (2021) also uses Tharani's (2020b) description of worldview as a 'can opener', which acknowledges the issues with the concept, but, like the can opener, it opens-up thinking about the term. The CoRE report, he argues, was never meant to be the last word on the issue and has been followed up by a number of REC publications investigating the concept (see Tharani 2020b, discussion papers). Flanagan also describes it as an evolving term, which is one of the most helpful remarks about the idea of worldviews. She suggests that the focus of the debate on worldviews needs to change from a debate over historical definitions of the term, to how it can be utilised to help improve teaching and learning in RE (2020, p336).

The lack of conceptual clarity is also raised by what CoRE counts as an institutional worldview. CoRE lists several possible worldviews which could be studied, including atheism, humanism and secularism. Hand (2018) writes that the world religions and humanism would count as a worldview, but the same cannot be said for secularism or atheism which do not have 'anything like the scope and ambition of a worldview'. Copson (2022), also agrees when he states that Humanism is a worldview but secularism is not - it is a political position which operates outside religious and non-religious frameworks as it can be applied to both.

Cooling (2020) and Flanagan (2020) both argue that the term 'worldview' needs to be reinterpreted to fit the educational needs of the RE classroom. On this basis, Cooling suggests that what might be included does not necessarily have to fit the traditional idea of a worldview and could also include intellectual movements such as scientism and consumerism; despite not being worldviews in the traditional sense, they do influence the formation of those of a personal nature. Quoting Billingsley (2017), Cooling points out that the worldviews of many young people are influenced by the epistemic belief that there is an inherent conflict between religion and science, which can lead to the difficulties RE teachers have in the classroom when students do not always take the study of religion seriously. This attitude is one I am familiar with, and shows how imperative it is to address sources of knowledge, the idea of truth and how they work in differing discipline areas (Cooling, 2020, p410).

Another objection to the CoRE worldview approach is the notion that everyone has a worldview or a way of seeing and making sense of the world around them (2018, p26). Hand (2018) responds to the assumption that everyone has a worldview by stating it 'looks very much like the imposition on non-believers of a category developed with believers in mind'. Barnes (2021) agrees and remarks that just because a person may have an opinion on God, few go on to think about other the existential questions needed to constitute a worldview. He writes 'they do not have a reflective philosophical view of the nature of reality, of the kind that is properly described as a worldview' (Barnes, 2021, p4). These objections to CoRE's use of the term 'worldview' make sense if there was one accepted understanding of what a worldview is. I reiterate that I consider Flanagan's description of a 'worldview' as an evolving term the most helpful way to approach it: the RE community needs to clarify how it can be understood

educationally, rather than engaging in endless debate over its numerous meanings. It would be wrong of CoRE to present a view of worldviews which imposes a religious framework on non-religious people, but as Cooling, Bowie and Panjwani state, the idea of a worldview presented by CoRE is broader than just a religious approach to life and reflects both the conscious and hidden assumptions held by all people and communities. They argue that everyone has, or inhabits, a worldview as everyone tries to make sense of life in some way, even if they cannot articulate it, or are not conscious of its influence on them (2020, p28ff).

Another connected criticism of CoRE's use of 'worldviews' is their presentation of personal worldviews as unified and coherent, when they often neither of these things (Barnes, 2021; Åhs, Poulter, and A. Kallioniemi, 2019). Barnes argues 'people can hold a range of beliefs and values, not always consistent with each other or with some of their experiences or even with their professed self-identity' (2021, p4). He has a point here, as personal worldviews are not necessarily unified and coherent. However, the diverse, complex and syncretic nature of a worldview is captured by CoRE when they write

> Religious and non-religious worldviews are complex, diverse and plural. Understanding them requires a nuanced, multidisciplinary approach (p4)… We need to ensure that pupils understand that there are different ways of adhering to a worldview – you may identify with more than one institutional worldview, or indeed none at all (2018, p6)

Further objections to the inclusion of worldviews is the notion that it would make an already packed curriculum more crowded which could lead to the superficial teaching and learning with a concomitant lack of rigour, and that worldviews could lead to the stereotyping of those

worldviews involved for studying many different religions and worldviews will mean you cannot study anyone one of them at depth (Tharani, 2020a; Brine and Chater, 2020; Barnes, 2021). Relatedly, Barnes writes that, apart from Humanism, the inclusion of non-religious worldviews would also lead to repetition of ideas, as beyond the denial of God and other metaphysical ideas, what other content would be included? (2021, p6).

In response, Cooling states that the criticisms of a lack of rigour, too much or too little content are a basic misinterpretation of what CoRE is actually trying to propose. It is not, as Barnes and others seem to think, about adding new content but a new way of thinking about curriculum design: it is about a change in the focus of the curriculum from a 'world religions paradigm' to a 'worldviews paradigm' focusing 'on the way in which all humans make sense of their lives through a study of how religious and non-religious worldviews work in human life' (2021b, p10). The addition of worldviews is therefore a change of perspective, rather than the addition of lots of new content.

Arguably, for those in the RE world who already include a variety of non-religious perspectives in lessons and who also focus on the personal development of the student, the change of name simply reflects what is already occurring in the classroom nationally. I would argue that as I become more familiar with the rationale behind the worldview paradigm, it does not feel like a massive change from what has been going on in my classroom for some years. Flanagan writes that the inclusion of worldviews does not mean a lot of new content, but instead gives

the opportunity to examine teaching and learning in RE which may be vital for the future of RE. She writes

> 'If teachers and pupils can see that all individuals possess a worldview, then the study of religion (s) and non-religious worldviews becomes a study of fellow human beings and their worldviews – a search, which all have in common, to understand and make meaning in the world, whether or not that contains a religious or spiritual aspect' (2020, pp338-339).

Another objection to worldviews is made by Hannam and Biesta (2019) who argue that the new worldview paradigm lacks spirituality. They claim that the study of worldviews objectifies the content, and that not enough emphasis is placed on the students' own personal worldviews. Having read the CoRE report I do not agree that spirituality has disappeared. The phrasing *learning from religion* is missing, but there is a constant reference to the personal worldviews of the students and, as Cooling (2020) points out, CoRE is very clear about the importance of the affective and behavioural dimensions of the subject, and its need focus on the lived experiences of adherents in all its complexity and diversity (CoRE, 2018, p72, pp76ff). Van der Kooij *et al.* argue that the inclusion of institutional and personal worldviews helps RE to avoid what they term as the 'two pitfalls in RE', noting that RE should not just be about learning objective facts to the detriment of the personal learning, and RE should not be reduced to the experience of the learner to the detriment of the academic study (2017, pp179ff).

Hannam and Biesta's opposition to the lack of spirituality in the worldview paradigm brings the debate back to the idea of personal development in RE. Rather than being a view of the

subject which is out of date, recent debate has shown that the personal development aspect of RE is still have much alive and relevant; Van der Kooij *et al.* argue that the idea of worldviews is present in both Grimmitt (1987) and Teece's (2008, 2009) work on human development and skilful means. Although, neither use the term 'worldview', the inclusion of religious, non-religious perspectives and the importance of the development of dialogue between a student's personal worldview and those they learn about in class is very important (Van der Kooij *et al.,* 2017, pp172ff). Arguably the idea of a personal worldview builds on their insights.

What is not present in CoRE (2018), however, is prescribing how the new worldview curriculum is to be taught and how the institutionalised and personal worldviews should be reflected in the classroom. On this basis, Hannam and Biesta (2019) are right to be concerned, for even though enabling a student to understand, reflect on and develop their own personal worldviews is classed as an one of the core tasks of education (CoRE 2018, p5), how this translates into classroom practice will make the difference to whether spirituality has been lost or not. Cooling argues that for CoRE to achieve this core task of education, they need to be clearer about the nature of the interaction between the personal and institutional worldviews. He writes, this pedagogical gap can be filled through the use of a hermeneutical approach

> There is, therefore, no such person as a purely-objective, fully neutral, critical learner. In order to be critical, objective and pluralistic, it is essential to be reflexive about one's own pre-understanding and the impact of that on one's reception of another person's worldview (2020, p411).

Drawing on the work of Thiselton (2009) on responsible hermeneutics, Cooling argues that everyone approaches the object of learning from a vantage point and that a student (and the teacher) needs to be taught how to navigate such a world. As such, there are three academic responsibilities in the learning process: the horizons of the student, the teacher, and the wider worldview as the object of study. Cooling also states that for Grimmitt (1987), great pedagogy in RE was to encourage a dialectical relationship between the student and religion studied. Importantly for RE as personal development, Cooling continues that rather than moving away from such insights, thinking about and formation of personal worldviews should build on previous learning on *'learning from religion'* as presented in Grimmitt's 1987 work (Cooling, 2020, p410).

Flanagan also argues that rather than focusing on, in the first instance, the institutional or organised worldviews starting with the 'personally embodied worldview' is the most clear starting point in the classroom for the teacher and student to enter into dialogue with the views of others (2020, p337). She continues that, through the use of a type of paradigmatic analysis, the study of personal worldview can encourage personal worldview consciousness which, in turn, 'may facilitate greater communication and understanding between individuals' (*ibid*, p339). She also writes that it is important to examine personal worldviews in classroom, as students and teachers will confront worldviews, beliefs and practices different from their own which can cause, in her words, 'worldview shock'. This shock is the emotional response to what they encounter, and this can take the form of anger, fear, frustration and disapproval. It is therefore an important role of the teacher to try and encourage their students to develop more of a worldview consciousness, and the understanding of positionality, where they take

more of an interest in the views of others as they understand that everyone has a position including themselves (*ibid,* pp340ff). The role of personal worldview consciousness also plays a key role in the REflect Project and Larkin *et al* write that focusing on the subjectivity and reflexivity of the student (and the teacher) is an important part of encouraging the student to engage in genuine dialogue with others, noting

> By ascertaining a greater awareness of their own personal worldviews, it was assumed that pupils would come to appreciate that they held particular assumption about the nature of reality and what can be known about it, and that these assumptions may not be the same as those of others. By recognising that their (non-)religious positioning was not only bounded and limited, but contingent upon particular personal experiences and assumptions it was hoped that pupils would become increasingly open to learning about alternative positions (2020, p9).

Despite the fact that the REflect Project does not purport to promote any form of personal development, but to advocates the aim of developing academic inquirers, their emphasis on developing a personal worldview consciousness with its concomitant support for personal reflection, evaluation, reflexivity and dialogue mirrors what RE as personal development is trying to achieve in the classroom.

2.5.2 RE and Knowledge

I have shown the idea of 'worldviews' and particularly that of 'personal worldview consciousness' is not contradictory to RE as personal development; indeed, the aim for RE as personal development benefits from the developing interest in the religion and worldviews approach, particularly when it comes to the development of personal worldviews. In this next

section I am going to explore another key aspect of the CoRE (2018) report in its requirement for 'religion and worldview' curriculums to be 'academically rigorous and a knowledge-rich' (CoRE, 2018, *Forward*). I will show how this emphasis on 'knowledge' can problematise RE as personal development, but how ultimately RE as personal development can still function as a desirable aim for RE.

The focus on knowledge in RE reflects a wider trend in education where, for the purposes of 'levelling up' and 'closing the gap', schools are adopting curriculum models which emphasise the 'knowledge-rich', and where students are encouraged to develop mastery over the bodies of 'knowledge' learnt in school. The promotion of knowledge in RE is taken up by Kueh who argues that RE has a 'knowledge problem' created by the lack of consensus over the aims for RE, which can only be solved by the creation of a clear contemporary rationale which 'demonstrates the disciplinary knowledge-base within it' (2018, p56). As part of this 'clear rationale' Kueh contends that RE needs to be unchained from its historical roots. He writes

> With traditions that focus on the experiential encounter with religion or unhelpfully assume positive possibilities in learning from religious expressions, or indeed that divorce learners so completely from the subject rationale, one can understand why there is such a degree of confusion about the nature and purpose of the knowledge that might be obtained from RE (2018, pp55-56).

Kueh continues that aims for RE such as Personal Development, which he claims 'assumes positive possibilities in learning from religious expressions' (*ibid*) and promotes an outdated liberal theology, are responsible for a lack of rigor and prevalence of sentimentality in RE. Kueh also contends aims like RE as Personal Development would 'flow organically' from a clear

knowledge-based curriculum. As such he also dismisses the attainment targets 'learning from religion' and 'learning about religion' as 'increasingly defective and unreliable' (*ibid,* pp55ff).

Kueh also goes on to claim that the key to solving the knowledge problem in RE derives from the sociologist Young's (2010, 2013, 2014) concept of 'Powerful Knowledge'. This, according to Kueh, occupies a middle ground between two opposing views: essentialism (see for example, Hirsch, 2007, 2011) which emphasises the importance of learning a body of knowledge and social constructivism (see for example, Vygotsky, 1978) in which knowledge is created or discovered. In contrast, a key facet of Powerful Knowledge is its promotion of a disciplinary way of thinking which helps students to understand the world in which they live and encourage them to explore the world beyond their individual experiences (Young, 2013, p196).

This disciplinary approach to knowledge, Kueh claims, could solve the knowledge problem in RE by unlocking the academic basis of RE through the teaching of both substantive and disciplinary knowledge: substantive knowledge being the specific content which is taught, and disciplinary knowledge where the content is contextualised through, for example, the use of the academic disciplines such as theology, philosophy and the social sciences (2018, p56ff).

In the recent Ofsted (2021) *Research review series: Religious Education* (written by Kueh as the chief HMI inspector for RE) it is proposed that a high-quality RE curriculum should be based on a 'cumulatively sufficient content' organised and structured within a conceptual framework (Ofsted, 2021) such as that being developed by Wintersgill *et al.* on *Big Ideas for Religious Education.* They. suggest a number of overarching ideas (hence Big Ideas), such as 'A Good

Life', 'Making Sense of Life's Experiences', (2015, p15) which reflect the purpose and goals of RE and are drawn from key disciplinary areas such as Theology, Social/Human sciences and Philosophy. These Big Ideas provide a means to connect and interpret the substantive knowledge and aid the student to make sense of what they are learning (*ibid*, p5). The contextualisation of substantive knowledge through the use of disciplinary thought in RE is also supported by Stones and Fraser-Pearce, however, they focus more on the development of 'epistemic literacy' in which the various types of 'knowledge' at play in any one lesson are made transparent. Here, students (and teachers) develop a critical understanding of the assumptions and values associated with the various forms of knowledge but crucially it also encourages the students to develop an understanding of their own 'epistemic priorities' informed by their upbringing, culture and experiences (2021, pp87ff).

Another facet of Powerful Knowledge, Kueh writes is its promotion of a critical approach to 'truth claims'. This is in contrast to a modern RE practice tends to present all truth claims as equally true and the habit of presenting religion only in a positive light. Kueh argues, as part of a critical realist framework, RE should be prepared to challenge such claims and give the students the tools to engage with religion in all its forms both positive and negative (2018, p66). Kueh's use of a critical realist framework echoes the work of Wright on Critical Religious Education which emphasises a realist theory of truth in which students are encouraged to move beyond mere opinion and to engage critically with the varying responses to the question of ultimate truth emanating from the differing religions and worldviews. Religion in this view are not treated as all the same, but as differing responses to the question of ultimate truth; to grapple with such questions, students need to be taught how to engage with such discussions

through the teaching of critical thinking (Wright, 2003, p280). More recently the value of knowledge and truth claims in RE have also been highlighted by Stones and Pearce. They argue that a lack of critical RE is encouraged when, in order to show 'respect', students do not question the 'truth claims' presented to them. Such curriculums, they argue, which emphasise 'respect' over rigor, and where opinion is seen as knowledge, can lead to students emerging from such as education as 'epistemically incapacitated', or illiterate (2021, pp355ff).

In a related manner, Smith, Nixon, and Pearce also note that RE teachers also have a tendency to essentialise religion by ascribing it only positive qualities by distancing the more negative aspects of religion, such as Islamic extremism, as being 'bad religion'. This, they argue, is to distort religious belief 'for it erroneously harmonizes and stagnates multifarious and dynamic religious beliefs and traditions' (2018, p1). They continue that religious literacy in RE can only be achieved if students are presented with, and encouraged to develop, a mature understanding of religion which encapsulates all aspects of religious expression, both good and bad. Essentialism, they argue is shallow and conceptually impoverished, which undermines the educational value of RE. Religion according to this view should be presented as a 'multifarious, complex, social phenomena' (*ibid*, p1) and students should be taught how to recognise, resist and denounce anti-social manifestations of religion without having to be fed essentialised distorted truths about religion (*ibid*, pp16ff).

None of the issues raised above are new (see chapters 2.4), and Kueh and others are right to raise them afresh to encourage the creators of RE curriculums to be mindful of ensuring that

religion is presented in a fair and realistic manner, and where students are encouraged to develop their critical thinking skills. I also readily admit the way in which RE as Personal Development has been interpreted could also be accused of encouraging essentialism, as it has not always been academically rigorous and has lacked content in favour of personal opinion. However, I think that many of the issues with RE as personal development, especially in relation to its relationship to Grimmitt's 'learning from religion' is the way in which it has been interpreted and applied. This can be seen in the way Grimmitt's 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion', were turned into attainment targets (their original use was as pedagogical tool) by the 1994 SCAA model syllabuses. Grimmitt pointed out that regardless of the model syllabuses' advocacy of 'learning from' and 'about religions' (the syllabuses adopted the plural), they failed to provide any strategies to implement the requirements of 'learning from religion'. This lack of strategies in turn led to a variety of interpretations of what 'learning from' and 'about religions' looked like in the classroom. One of which was an over emphasis of the term 'learning from' by curriculum writers and teachers to the detriment of any specific content. Teece also cites evidence of this practice, for example, in the QCA Non-Statutory Guidance of 2000, where 'learning from religion' was described as 'processes and skills' and generic 'teaching methods', and no mention was made of what specific subject content to include. Wright comments on such practice, when he writes the terms suffered from a lack of rigour and could benefit from his critical realist approach: 'learning about', he argued, needed to include more critical thinking and engagement with truth claims, and 'learning from' more engagement with existential issues and concerns both personal and religious (2003, p288).

Despite the issues, I am not convinced that the personal development approach to RE, and the terms ‘learning from religion’ and ‘learning about religion’, should be dismissed as ‘defective and unreliable’ (Kueh, 2018, p55). Instead, it would be more useful to return to, develop and reinvigorate Grimmitt’s (1987) two statements as pedagogical tools rather than focusing on the ways in which the terms have been misinterpreted and misunderstood. Much of what Wright (2003) and others, claim for high quality modern RE such as critical thinking, engagement with truth claims and existential issues are there in the original intentions for the terms: Grimmitt, for example, in his aim to develop a ‘dialectical relationship’ between the student and the content studied, and later Teece in his focus on ‘skilful means’ which aimed to develop ‘critical filters to illuminate and inform … personal perspective’ (Stolberg and Teece, 2010, p67).

I am also not persuaded by Kueh’s claim that the aims of personal development would ‘flow organically’ from any knowledge-based RE curriculum and that more attention needs to be paid to the needs of the learner. The pool of content from which an RE curriculum can draw its ‘knowledge’ is vast, and many of the topics and areas of concern for religions and worldviews can contribute to a student’s personal development, but can this be said of all the possible ways in which religion and worldviews can be presented to a student? It is vital in RE that the content chosen is such that it is relevant to the students in some way and can create bridges between their worldviews and that of religious and non-religious worldviews.

The importance of trying to engage students on a personal level is highlighted by the research of Woodhead and her depiction of those aged between 18-24 years who describe themselves as having no religion (called the 'nones') as they do not identify with an organised religion. However, this does not then follow they are uninterested in religious and spiritual questions and ideas (2016, p258). The students in the classroom are younger, but the views of the 'nones' have to come from somewhere, so it is important that the way in which religion and worldviews are presented in the classroom is done in a way which interests and engages students, for no matter how 'academic' a subject is presented, it will achieve little if the students, who are the beneficiary of the education see it as irrelevant to them. As Philips argues (2020) RE must therefore take the students' horizon seriously and create bridges with their experiences. No matter what some might argue, Philips continues, RE is different to other subjects, as religion is about the unknowable, and, more than any other subject students will bring into the classroom their views of, and metaphorical baggage in relation to, religion which are not always positive or helpful:

> To those inside a tradition religious ritual is powerful and transformative. To those outside, such as many of the children we teach, religion is frankly bonkers (2020, p11).

Philips writes that approaches which address the learner's own horizon can enhance academic learning as the student see the point of what it is they are learning about (2020, p10ff). The symbols of religion, she continues, are often the product of an 'inner spirituality which comes from a different period of time', which can mean the students do not understand the meaning of these symbols and myths. This in turn can lead to a lack of engagement with the subject, as

many students do not see that the subject has anything to say to them (*ibid*, p22). To only focus only on cognitive knowledge in RE is also to focus on the end product, not on where these beliefs and rituals come from which is where bridges to the experience of the students can be made. Young people, Philips continues are naturally preoccupied with their own search for personal identity, a sense of belonging and place in the world. This too is the realm of religion and worldviews, and forms the basis of much religious ritual, symbolism and belief. To create these bridges, the content of RE taps into these concerns to create interest and engagement, from which deeper academic work can be encouraged (2022, p3).

A lack of attention on the learner and the consequences of this are also noted by Jarmy who argues that the solution to Kueh's knowledge problem is not going to be found in excluding the learner, for by doing so mistakenly treats the student as an observer of the 'social reality of which they are learning about' when they are in fact part of the discourse (2021, pp142-143). Drawing on Aldridge (2011, 2015, 2018), Jarmy argues that knowledge gained in RE cannot be conceived of prior to a knowing subject, as the 'knowledge' is a result of dialogue between the knower and the content of religion. Jarmy states

> Knowledge of religions such as Sikhism or Christianity cannot exist prior to a subject coming to know it. What is being learned about is situated within a particular way of seeing the world that the subject must be welcomed into, and indeed, she must herself step into it, if she is to come to know anything. If the knowing subject is not borne in mind, the endeavour is doomed (2021, p144).

Knowledge in RE is more than just content, and is the active engagement with living tradition and with other people. Treating knowledge in RE as merely facts to learn is, in Jarmy's view, to

treat the other as an object (2021, p145). Dialogue, instead is relational knowledge where the students are encouraged to 'engage with the other, and come to understand that other' (*ibid,* p146), and to do this they must also be able to question their own values, beliefs and assumptions (Gadamer, 2004). To emphasise 'dialogue' Aldridge points out is not to be anti-academic, but students should not be treated as passive receivers of knowledge. Therefore, to try and confine what it is a student gets from their engagement with the subject material of RE through the imposition of a core knowledge curriculum or application of academic disciplines is 'inadequate to an educational justification of RE' (2018, p254).

This perceived lack of reference to the 'learner' is a major concern, especially for anyone who sees RE as being more than a narrow focus on knowledge. However, despite Kueh's criticisms of the personal development approach, this is in fact not what he is arguing for. This can be seen in the Ofsted subject report for RE (2021) three forms of knowledge are recounted as being important for RE: substantive, disciplinary and personal, and the creators of RE curriculums are specifically directed to consider carefully what content is the most useful for students to develop personal knowledge, and that links need to be made to the students' worldview or horizon, so that all students are helped to 'see the immediate value of the content' (Ofsted, 2021). On the one hand, this recommendation shows that the concerns of RE as personal development have not gone away. However, unlike Flanagan (2020) who suggests that personal worldviews would make a clear starting point for the beginning of curriculum planning, the report makes no such recommendation beyond the need for curriculum writers to ensure a balance between the three types of knowledge. As many curriculum writers are not RE subject specialists, I fear the subtleties of this approach will be

lost and lead to a repetition of past mistakes. In addition, because of the pressure in some schools on the provision of a 'knowledge-rich curriculum', and despite the direction that all three forms of knowledge ought to be included in a 'high quality curriculum', the Personal Knowledge aspect could be assumed, ignored by some curriculum writers or even seen as superfluous.

Also of interest to the debate over the lack of reference to the learner and for the continued evolution of the meaning of RE as personal development, is to be found by returning to the idea of disciplinary knowledge in RE. Both Aldridge (2018) and Jarmy (2021) argue that the student should not be simply a passive receiver of knowledge, but the disciplinary approach, as it is articulated by Kueh (2020) and Shaw (2019), could instead provide a way for the student to be an active participant in the creation of knowledge. As recounted by Kueh, the disciplinary knowledge, such as theology and the human sciences which sit above the substantive knowledge can be used as part of the teaching and learning process to facilitate the dialogue in the classroom from a variety of angles. Disciplinary knowledge problematises the dialogue and has the potential to transform the understanding of the knower and their relationship with what is learnt. This Kueh, argues could result in personal transformation in a variety of different ways, for example, worldview transformation, existential transformation and, formation of new learning identities (2020, pp144ff). This dialogue is described by Shaw as a hermeneutical process which enables the student to challenge attitudes and prejudices in themselves and others (2019, p154), and is expressed by Stones and Fraser-Pearce as the development of 'Epistemic Literacy' in which self-awareness is developed through not only

drawing attention to how knowledge works but also, by its reflexive nature, encouraging the student to identify and evaluate their own epistemic preferences (2022, p94).

2.6 Concluding Remarks

As has been shown in this chapter, RE as personal development has gone through a number of related manifestations from Grimmitt's 'Depth Themes' (1973); 'Human Development', 'Learning from religion' (1987); the Westhill Project's 'Three fields of enquiry' (1986); and Teece's Skilful means and Human transformation (2008, 2009, 2010a). All have their issues, and all have contributed to the idea that what is taught and presented in RE should give the student the opportunity to learn something of personal relevance to them.

In the current debate on the nature and aims of RE, particularly in an educational culture which prizes substantive knowledge, it is forgivable to assume that RE as personal development has been abandoned. The issues which have been raised, such as those expressed by Kueh's 'Knowledge Problem' (2018) reflects the concerns of several writers, and are timely reminder to RE curriculum writers to ensure that the religion and worldviews taught are presented in a fair, diverse and relevant manner, that students are taught how to critically engage with the substantive knowledge presented to them, and that the knowledge is not romanticised to promote tolerance or respect.

What is clear, is that the terms 'Learning from religion' and 'Learning about religion' may be fading from the RE landscape, but the focus on personal development in RE, as an evolving

term, has not disappeared and can only develop into a more nuanced approach. This can be seen through the use of key concepts such as positionality, reflexivity, dialogue, personal knowledge and personal worldviews in the works of Jarmy (2021), Shaw (2019), Cooling (2020), Flanagan (2020), Larkin *et al* (2020) and Ofsted (2021). Flanagan, for example, talks about the use of 'paradigmatic analysis' to encourage students to be more conscious of their own worldview and that of others; Cooling refers to the importance of creating a dialogue between the student and the content they are studying using Grimmitt's 'dialectical relationship' and Kueh (2020), Shaw (2019) and Stones and Fraser-Pearce (2022) on the role of disciplinary knowledge which could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what personal development looks like and how it might be achieved.

Having established that 'RE as personal development' is still a desirable aim for RE, the issue still remains of how to effectively engage the student with the views of others. This has been highlighted by several writers, including Kay (1997), and more recently by Larkin *et al.* (2020) who writes that it is difficult to conceptualise the relationship between the students' own interests and the study of religion/worldviews (p3). Engagement in the learning process is clearly an issue for all subject areas, but for 'RE as personal development', which specifically aims to encourage students to develop their ability to engage not only with their own thoughts on what they learn but also to reflect on the views of others, the issue is more salient. Flanagan (2020) writes about the idea of 'worldview shock', and how the emotional response a student has to what they learn may have a negative effect on their overall engagement. Indeed, this is my experience: for many students, the content and teaching strategies contained in a lesson support their initial engagement with RE, so that they are open to learning more both

academically and personally. However, for others, no matter what is taught or how it is presented, there is a refusal to engage which can be expressed through a lack of interest, apathy and outright hostility. Again, all subjects suffer from this, but having taught History, Geography and RE at KS3 to the same sets of students I have witnessed significant differences in attitude towards History and Geography in contrast to RE.

All of various forms of 'RE as personal development' offer lesson strategies for reflection and dialogue but there is very little, until recently, on *how* a student can be supported to engage with the reflective process in the first place. Erricker and Erricker (2000) note that RE which aims at some sort of personal or spiritual development needs to engage more with how students are *engaged in learning* than what they learn about. In terms of this thesis, it highlights the question of *how* more students can be encouraged to engage with the personal development aim of RE.

CHAPTER 3:

BUILDING LEARNING POWER

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I identified a missing pedagogical strategy, between the hopes for RE as personal development to engage students with existential questions, and the lack of practical strategies to engage the students in the first place. In this chapter I introduce Building Learning Power (BLP) an approach that I will argue serves to fill this gap.

As an approach to the development of a metacognitive learning environment, BLP has existed for over twenty years and has been influential in many schools and education systems across the world. It has given rise to the Expansive Education Network, in which teachers and schools are supported in creating their own learning habit curriculums. This chapter explains how BLP relates to the broader concept of learning to learn (L2L), what the rationale behind BLP is and how it works. It will look at some of the many theories and scholars who have influenced the approach and how it is connected to, and draws strength from, other metacognitive classroom approaches to learning. This chapter also outlines and responds to some of the main criticisms of the approach

3.2 Learning to Learn

Learning to Learn (L2L) as a concept is not new and can be seen in a variety of different formulations in educational research back into the 1950s when people started to apply the

idea of metacognition, or ‘thinking about thinking’, to education. The term L2L itself can be a bit of a misnomer as it is not teaching the students the ability to learn (as this is an innate ability from birth) but, as Mannion and McAllister (2020) define it, L2L is the attempt to unpick the often implicit or invisible processes of learning and drawing ‘them out into the light and make them explicit, visible – and therefore learnable (*ibid*, p37). Claxton (2006) in his *Learning to Learn – The Fourth Generation* argues that L2L has evolved over time and can be grouped into four differing approaches (figure 2).

Learning to learn — the four generations

First Generation	Raising attainment Outcome of schooling (e.g. KS2 SATs results) 'Good teaching' was about content and acquisition 'Good teachers' could put across information, develop literacy and numeracy, etc.
Second Generation	Develop study skills Hints and tips on retaining and recalling for tests Practising techniques 'Good teaching' as before, plus delivering these techniques
Third Generation	Expanded to include emotional factors (e.g. self-esteem) Characteristic ways of learning (e.g. multiple intelligences) 'Good teaching' included reducing stress levels and helping students raise their attainment levels Concerned with the 'how' of teaching
Fourth Generation	Involvement of students in the processes Concerned with how students can be helped to help themselves (e.g. think creatively) Teachers themselves involved in becoming better learners Developmental and cumulative — encouraging the 'ready and willing', not just the 'able'

Fig 2: Learning to Learn – the four generations retrieved from https://mkx20bvs5a2cy6u43bq2jqtp-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BLP_L2L4G_sample.pdf [18/10/2020]

Claxton describes BLP as being part of the fourth generation (G4) of L2L and a product of the evolution of a series of L2L models which preceded it (2006, p9). The third generation (G3) of

L2L, which Claxton calls the 'adolescence' of the L2L approach, included approaches to learning often based on pseudo-scientific claims, such as teaching to a preferred learning style, or that having water and bananas in lessons enabled children to learn better. In contrast, Claxton adds the G4 of L2L needed 'to be much more circumspect' and learn from the 'lapses and excesses' of what had come e when ideas were over simplified, formulaic and L2L was seen as a quick fix *(ibid*, p9). A key feature of G4 L2L is that it had moved from the teachers asking how they could 'teach' better to involving students in the cultivation of their own learning habits. G4 takes the importance of students becoming aware of how they can help themselves self-regulate and become better learner seriously. It is focused on the habits and dispositions which underpin the learning process, but this does not mean it is anti-knowledge; rather Claxton describes the interaction between the learning habits and subject content as like the 'warp and weft of the cloth on a loom', but unlike previous models of L2L, the teacher is explicit in the development of both (*ibid,* p12).

3.3 What is Building Learning Power?

BLP is an approach to learning inspired by the work of Claxton and developed by The Learning Organisation (TLO). The concept of BLP has been articulated through several articles and publications by Claxton (see, for example, 1984, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). Claxton is no longer involved with TLO but seeks to promote what he terms the Learning Power Approach (LPA) which is a distillation of BLP and other similar initiatives. In his book *The Learning Power Approach: Teaching Learners to Teach Themselves* (2018) Claxton refers to these initiatives as being part of an LPA nuclear family, which also includes several approaches to learning habits to emerge from Harvard University's Project Zero.

Costa and Kallick's 'Habits of Mind' (2009, 2013) is cited as being part of this nuclear family: as an approach to learning dispositions, it shares many similarities with BLP, including the promotion of a range of learning habits. Claxton lists a whole raft of other approaches which he calls 'godparents, friends and neighbours' which include the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) and Lipman's Philosophy for Children, P4C (Claxton, 2018, p6ff).

Claxton describes BLP as occupying a middle ground between traditional and progressive educational views, because, while it supports student academic achievement, it also aims to develop students to become 'powerful, confident real-life learners' as part of an 'epistemic apprenticeship' (2008, p121). During the apprenticeship, teachers explicitly model and cultivate key learning habits which are embedded across all aspects of school life. Although different teaching styles can be used to promote the learning habits, teachers are encouraged to develop lessons in which they take on the role of a coach or facilitator, and students are given opportunities to make choices, be challenged and co-operate. As McWilliams puts it, teachers should act more as 'a meddler in the middle' where education is not done to the students, but where teachers intervene to allow learning to occur (2005, p5).

The BLP method itself has its origins in publications going back to the 1980s, but it was first presented to teachers as a full teaching pedagogy in Claxton's book *Building Learning Power* (2002). The strategy has two frameworks: the first is called the Supple Learning Mind (figure 3) which aims to show what factors need to be taken into consideration when it comes to successful learning. Called the four 'R's they are

Resilience -being ready, willing, and able to lock on to learning,
Resourcefulness -being ready, willing, and able to learn in different ways,
Reflectiveness -being ready, willing, and able to become more strategic about learning,
Reciprocity -being ready, willing, and able to learn alone and with others (Claxton, 2002, p17).

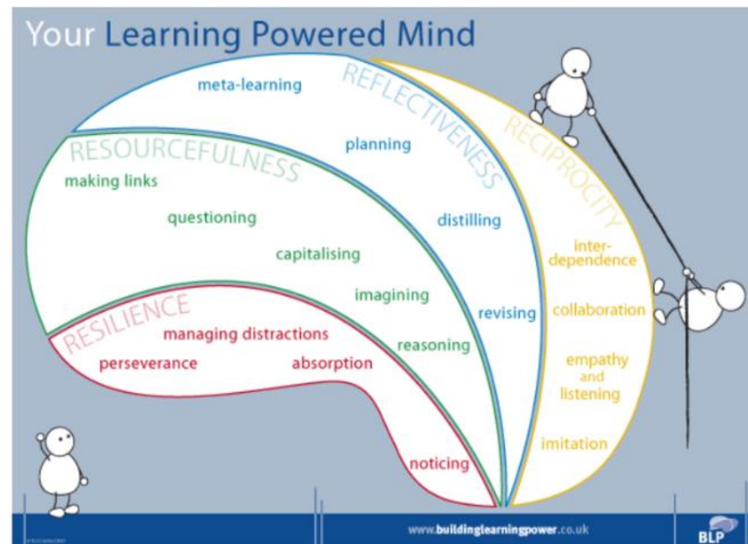


FIG 3: BLP LEARNING FRAMEWORK: THE SUBTLE LEARNING MIND RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.BUILDINGLEARNINGPOWER.COM/2015/05/HOW-ITS-DONE/ [15/06/2020]

Each 'R' is split into four or five learning habits (figure 4) which enables teachers and students to focus on one specific learning habit, rather than being overwhelmed by all four domains at once.

The choice of these four areas shows that BLP is not just about promoting higher order thinking or academic learning but considers all aspects of learning from the emotional to the strategic, metacognitive and the collaborative. Learning, according to Claxton, ‘embraces both reason and experience, mind and body, thought and feeling’ (2018, p182). Overall, BLP is a holistic

approach to learning which aims to create a metacognitive learning environment, in which students are helped to be more aware of themselves as learners through the development of self-regulation and the learning habits needed for successful learning.

4Rs	Resilience	Resourcefulness	Reflectiveness	Reciprocity
Learning Habits	absorption	questioning	planning	interdependence
	managing distractions	making links	revising	collaboration
	noticing	imagining	distilling	empathy and listening
	perseverance	reasoning	meta-learning	imitation
		capitalising		

FIG: 4 TABLE OF THE 4RS AND LEARNING HABITS

The second BLP framework is called the 'Teachers' Palette' (figure 5) and is a guide to the implementation of BLP across a school's learning culture. It addresses how lessons should be structured to include the teaching of the learning habits, how classrooms should look, and the role of the teacher in promoting and commenting on the learning habits. It also emphasises that it is not only teaching staff who should embody the principles of BLP, but also support staff and others who help a school to function (Claxton, *et al.,* 2011, p45).

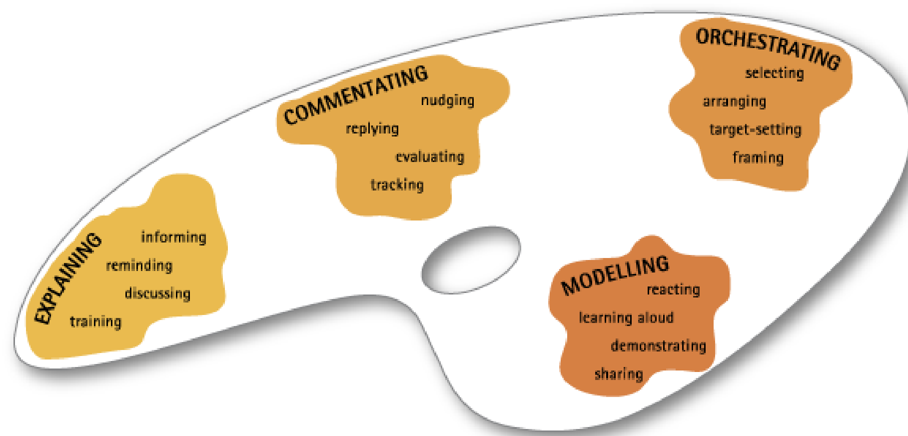


FIG 5: BLP LEARNING FRAMEWORK OLD PALETTE RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.BUILDINGLEARNINGPOWER.COM/2018/05/CREATING-METACOGNITIVE-CLASSROOM-CULTURES/ [15/06/2020]

The palette offers four strands to support the teacher in the construction and teaching of lessons: explaining, commentating, orchestrating, and modelling. However, since the curriculum intervention the palette was changed to reflect school curriculum reforms in which subjects' requirements are far heavier and more difficult; the palette now contains relating, talking, constructing, and celebrating (figure 6).

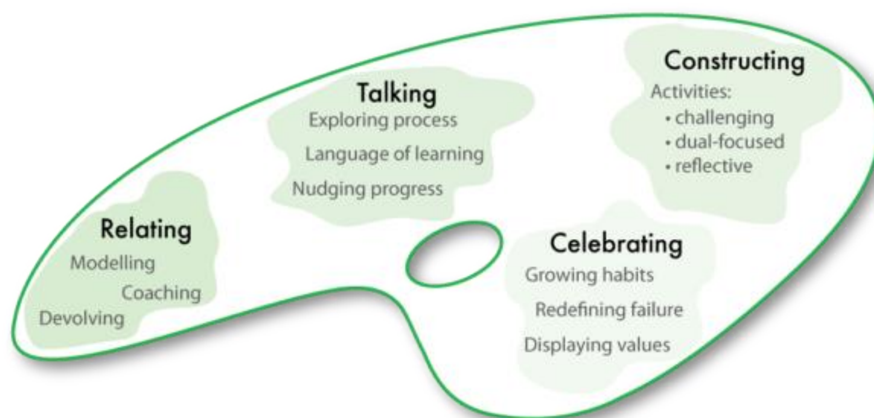


FIG 6: BLP LEARNING FRAMEWORK NEW PALETTE RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.BUILDINGLEARNINGPOWER.COM/2018/05/CREATING-METACOGNITIVE-CLASSROOM-CULTURES/ [15/06/2020]

3.4 Why was BLP developed?

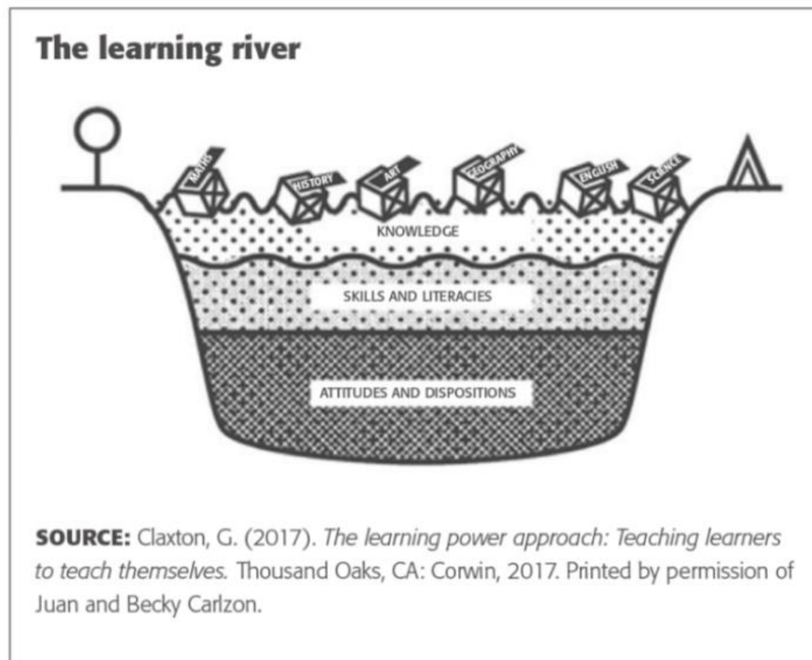
BLP was developed to combat the inadequacies of the G3 models of L2L, and it addresses several interconnected issues. Firstly, Claxton was concerned that the emphasis on examination success and league tables had, in many schools, led to a teaching style which did nothing to encourage students' independence and creativity. In a later reflection on BLP, he writes

> You can teach Macbeth and get good exam results, in a way that stretches students' abilities to imagine, collaborate and question. And you can teach Macbeth, get good results, in a way that makes students more passive, docile and dependent (Claxton *et al.*, 2011, p5).

Claxton acknowledges that many school initiatives have attempted to develop the positive learning habits such as to 'imagine, collaborate and question,' but many only address these learning habits in a separate L2L lesson or as a learning habit 'hints and tips' appended to lessons. Drawing on the work of Perkins (1995), Claxton argues that talking about learning habits removed from subject content does not help the student to become a better learner, because it cannot be assumed that learning in one context will naturally come to mind in another. Separate L2L lessons, he continues, rarely change a school's learning culture, as there is often little or no connection between the habits learnt and subject lessons. Learning habits, therefore, need to be explicitly embedded across school life because, if they are not, this knowledge can become inert and not be applicable across differing contexts (2019, p183).

Key to BLP is its use of the terms 'learning habits,' 'dispositions' or 'capacities,' rather than 'skills'. BLP aims to go beyond developing skills and provides learning opportunities to help to steer students to become learners who are 'more positive, confident and capable in the face of difficulty' (Claxton, 2019, pp29ff). The term 'skill' is utilised in subject areas: for example, in PE students may be taught a football skill, or in English the skills to read. Skills are abilities which you can be trained to do; however, they are not always things you may be willing to do. Confusion can occur when teachers assume that specific subject skills are the same as BLP learning habits.

The confusion is illustrated by Juan and Becky Carlzon's image of 'The Learning River' which is referred to by Claxton (2019) - see figure 7. The river has three levels, and the first two are very familiar to teachers: knowledge, then skills – including literacies and expertise's such as numeracy and literacy – and then finally, underpinning the knowledge and skills, are the less familiar learning habits or dispositions. In contrast to skills, learning habits are those attributes of character, such as resilience, which are developed over time and will often become second nature. It is these habits which help to shape student engagement in their learning. This deeper view of learning is expressed in the first BLP framework in which Claxton asserts that a student needs to be 'ready, willing and able' to learn in which to be 'ready' means they consciously seek out opportunities to learn; 'willing' means they want to develop their learning habits; and 'able' means they have the right tools or skills at their disposal with which to tackle any learning (Lucas and Claxton, 2010, pp43ff).



SOURCE: Claxton, G. (2017). *The learning power approach: Teaching learners to teach themselves.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2017. Printed by permission of Juan and Becky Carlzon.

FIG: 7 THE LEARNING RIVER BY JUAN AND BECKY CARLZON RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://KAPPANONLINE.ORG/CLAXTON-DEEP-RIVERS-LEARNING/ [15/06/20]

Secondly, in combatting G3 models of L2L, BLP was developed as Claxton was keen to promote the idea of 'learnable intelligence' which, he argues, is key to student engagement and confidence in the learning process. Drawing on the work of Perkins (1995) and Dweck (2007), he argues that intelligence is not fixed, but can change and develop. BLP, he claims, is one way in which young people can be helped to develop the learning habits needed to become more resilient and resourceful, and failure is not a negative but seen as a learning tool, and where getting stuck is the beginning of a new learning experience and not the end (Claxton, 2008, pp60ff).

Lastly, Claxton sees the explicit teaching of learning habits to be important, so schools not only prepare students for examinations, but also promote the learning habits and dispositions

needed to be successful in life, and 'enable young people to face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently, and creatively' (Claxton *et al.,* 2011, p2). As an educational psychologist, Claxton (2008) is concerned about the mental health and well-being of young people. He refers to the 2007 UNICEF report, *Children's Wellbeing in Rich Countries,* which ranks the UK as the worst out of 21 developed nations for childhood well-being (the study was repeated in 2017, and the UK performed only slightly better, coming in at number 16). The reports show that in the UK the constant demand for students to perform well in school and to pass tests and exams has had an impact on the well-being of many young people. This is reflected in the longitudinal study *Time trends in adolescent mental health* (Collishaw *et al*. 2004) which comments that the increased focus on academic attainment is a major contributing factor to the increase in teenage mental health issues (*ibid*, p1360). Helping young people to develop their learning habits is just one way in which to assist a student in dealing with the increased pressures of school.

The lack of awareness of the importance of building learning habits into a curriculum can affect all students, whether they are academically successful or not. Claxton bemoans the fact that some students' achievement may be high, but their resilience can be fragile if they are not encouraged to see mistakes or are unable to do something as part of the learning process. He quotes a study by Dweck carried out at Stanford University, in which she gave a group of students a mathematics booklet to complete. Some students were given an extra page of difficult questions in the middle of the book, which even the most mathematically minded would find difficult to complete. Those given the more difficult questions were affected negatively, but it was high achieving girls who struggled the most and, when they could not

complete the harder questions, their confidence was affected so much they then lost the ability to do the easier questions (2000, p25).

Claxton points out that the development of learning habits essential for life after school is another way in which all students can win, whatever their academic ability. Claxton and Lucas' book *Educating Ruby* (2015) demonstrates this idea through the character of Ruby, who had left school with only two GCSEs at D and E grades. Despite this, when meeting one of her old teachers she thanks them for her education. The teacher is, understandably, a little confused, as they remember D and E GCSE grades. However, she explains

> 'You helped me develop my self-confidence […] You gave me the feeling that there were many worthwhile things I could achieve and become, if I put my mind to it, even though they were not academic things […] By pushing me and not giving up on me, you helped me learn to be a can-do sort of person' (2015, p56).

3.5 How does BLP link to and build upon other educational theories?

3.5.1 The use of language

For Claxton, the distinctions made between skills and literacies, learning habits or dispositions (figure 7) is an important one. Skills and literacies, he argues can be shared by different subject areas but they can support the building of knowledge in a particular subject, for example, in History a 'making a judgement' is a particular skill. Learning habits and dispositions on the other hand are those qualities which underpin the building of specific subject skills. For example, if you are asked to make a judgement in History underpinning this are the abilities, for example, to listen, notice, question and reason. However, as is evident in the literature on BLP and other similar theories of learning, the use of terms to describe learning habits or

dispositions is very fluid, and Claxton's distinction can be lost. For example, Mannion and McAllister (2020) use the term skill in the same way that Claxton uses the term learning habit. They also usefully describe all approaches to learning which advocate the teaching of learning habits, or their equivalent, under the umbrella title of a 'metacognition movement', and Claxton now uses The Learning Power Approach to group together like-minded approaches. Other terms which appear in the literature include learning to learn (L2L), conative or noncognitive skills, learning skills, learning capacities, thinking skills, cognitive modifiability, habits of mind and learning character. There are differences between these terms but what is important is their common aim to help students develop their ability to learn through the creation of metacognitive learning environments.

3.5.2 Influential educational theories

BLP draws on, and links to, several associated educational theorists who share similar ideas. Aubrey and Riley (2019) observe that Claxton's emphasis on real-world learning, in which students are encouraged to develop the leaning habits needed for life beyond school, echoes the work of Dewey in his *Pedagogic Creed* (1897) in which he argues for a school curriculum advocating reflection and active learning linked to the real world. Indeed, Dewey's influence on Costa and Kallick's habits of mind is noted by Campbell when he states, 'Dewey's work flows seamlessly into Habits of Mind such as Metacognition, Striving for Accuracy, Thinking Flexibly and Creating, Imagining and Innovating' (Campbell, 2006, p5). Other links to eminent educational theorists made by Aubrey and Riley include Vygotsky (1978) creator of the influential concept zone of proximal development (ZPD) which was developed by Bruner (1978) into the teaching and learning tool of *scaffolding.* The links are reflected in Claxton's

coaching approach to teaching in which the teacher models and prompts the students in their learning (Claxton, 2019, p233).

Other theorists, who Claxton *et al.* cites as having a direct influence on his creation of BLP, are referred to as the 'giants on which BLP stands' (2011, p30). The key areas that these 'giants' have influenced include

1. the concepts of an epistemic apprenticeship and metacognitive learning environments
2. the concepts of learnable intelligence and the transfer of learning
3. the creation of the 4R's and in particularly resilience

3.5.2.1 Epistemic Apprenticeship and metacognitive learning environments

The inclusion of the term 'epistemic apprenticeship' in Claxton's work, and the role of the teacher to create this environment, has been borrowed from the work of scholars such as Langer, Hattie, Lave and Wenger. Langer in her research into the power of teacher language, reflects the BLP emphasis through her work on the effect a teacher can have on their students as learners, especially in the way they speak, talk, and write about their students. As shown in the second BLP framework (figures 5 and 6), to cultivate a metacognitive environment in the classroom, teachers need to change the language used and to be prepared to comment, explain, and model the learning habits. Langer's work influences this view, and she claims that even small changes in the language used by the teacher in the classroom can change a student's attitude to their learning. For example, by using conditional or - as Langer calls it - 'could be' language, a teacher can encourage their students to be more curious, critical, and imaginative towards their learning (1997 p3ff).

Not only does Hattie lend support to the importance of enabling students to take ownership of their learning, but, as Claxton comments, Hattie's research serves to highlight that developing learning habits does not contradict academic achievement but supports it (Claxton *et al.* 2011, p31). In his *Visible Teaching* he argues that the teacher's role and potential impact in the classroom are very important. Hattie states

> the greatest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers. When students become their own teachers, they exhibit the self-regulatory attributes that seem most desirable for learners (self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-assessment, self-teaching) (2012, p14).

Hattie argues that teachers should show themselves as learners so that the processes are visible to the students: through this, the teacher can model what it is to self-regulate and to be their own teachers with students learning through example what it is to be a learner. Hattie also argues that teachers need to pay particular attention to student dispositions to learning which can include the confidence towards learning, the motivation to learn and the strategies of learning. Teachers, Hattie continues, need to understand what he terms 'self-processes' with regards to learning, such as self-efficacy, self-motivation and social comparisons, and he believes that more positive learning dispositions can be taught and learnt, so that students are more resilient, more open to learning from others and can successfully regulate their own learning. In short, they become confident life-long learners (2012, pp14ff).

Claxton states that Lave and Wenger have had a considerable influence on BLP and the metacognitive learning culture it wants to promote in schools. The influence is also noted by

Aubrey and Riley (2019) who draw attention to the close similarities between BLP's 'epistemic apprenticeship' (where teachers work alongside students to model and scaffold the learning habits required to be an effective lifelong learner) and Lave and Wanger's situated learning (1991), and Wenger's communities of practice (1998). These theories draw on their sociological study of midwives, tailors, and other apprenticeship-type professions, in which learning is social, collective, and shared. In a procedure which they call 'legitimate peripheral participation,' novice learners work with more experienced learners to develop and master the skills and knowledge required, so that they, in time, become experts (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p213ff). Claxton also argues that schools need to become more like these communities of practice in which students are given the tools to cultivate the learning habits needed for life (Claxton *et al.* 2011, p32).

3.5.2.2 Learnable intelligence and the transfer of learning

Gardner, Perkins, and Dweck are more of Claxton's giants and they are cited as influencing the ideas of learnable intelligence and resilience. Co-founder, with Perkins, of the Harvard Universities Project Zero, Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (MIT) had an influence on the creation of BLP. Despite the criticism of MIT (for example White, 2005; Visser, Ashton and Vernon, 2006), Claxton argues that Gardner's theory has highlighted that intelligence is more complex than traditionally presented, and – whether there are multiple intelligences or multiple capacities – human cognition should not be seen as 'some kind of monolithic faculty, separate from the rest of our psychological processes, but as an umbrella idea, covering a variety of constituent abilities' (Claxton *et al.* 2011, p31). BLP, he continues, is indebted to MIT

for opening-up the debate on a much broader view of intelligence and has given teachers the freedom to nurture other talents and abilities.

Perkin's (1995, 2007) contributions to the concept of transfer of learning, and his research on learnable intelligences has, according to Claxton *et al*. 'encouraged us by showing just how much of our so-called 'intelligence' is in fact learned, and therefore capable of being helped to grow in timely and productive ways' (2011, p33). Also supportive of BLP, and linked to the work of Perkins, is Dweck's research into Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2000, 2007, 2017, 2019). She argues that 'learning is learnable,' as intelligence is like a muscle which can develop and become stronger through hard work and effort. She argues that a person's motivation to learn can be severely affected by the way they see themselves: if a person's self-theory is that they are not smart (fixed mindset) they are less likely to see the point in making any effort to improve their learning, but if they see themselves as being able to become more intelligent (growth mindset) they are more likely to engage in the effort and hard work needed to improve their learning. Dweck continues that, from her research in schools and higher education, the achievement of many students can be improved through this relatively simple intervention of mindset (2007). From Dweck's ideas, BLP seeks to promote the view that, through positive learner motivation towards their own learning, students can understand that they can have more control over their learning destiny. Claxton *et al.* comments

> Dweck teaches us to focus on the expandability of young people's minds rather than their fixedness; and this realisation – that what we do affects how children think and learn, as well as what they know – is the springboard that makes the very idea of 'building young people's learning power' credible (2011, p30).

2.5.2.3 The creation of the 4R's and in particularly resilience

Other research which also looks at the effects of having a positive attitude to learning come from Bandura, Rotter, Seligman and Duckworth. Bandura (1994, 1997, 2008) defines self-efficacy as 'the belief in one's ability to influence events that effects one's life and control over the way these events are experienced' (1994). A student's own view of their self-efficacy will affect their ability to learn: if they believe they have no control over their own learning and personal growth is impossible, this will stunt their learning. The concept of self-efficacy is central to the ethos of BLP and Aubrey and Riley comment that the 4Rs of BLP (resilience, resourcefulness, reflection and reciprocity) are examples of the sorts of learning capacities needed in developing self-efficacy (2019, p234). Bandura's work reflects that done by Rotter (1966, 1972, 1989), on the 'locus of control' which is the belief of how in control an individual is of their own live: if they have an internal locus of control, they believe that they are in control of what happens to them. If they have an external locus of control, they believe that external influences have more of an effect on their life over which they have little control. Seligman (2005, 2015, 2011, 2017) also talks about another related concept of 'learned helplessness' in which students have not learnt to take control of their own learning and see where they are at as fixed: such students will often lack resilience and will wait for others to answer questions in lesson. This highlights the importance of developing a student's learning habits, and Seligman argues that 'learned optimism' is also possible when students come to understand that personal growth is possible and that they can improve their learning ability.

3.6 What support is there for BLP and other BLP like approaches?

The evidence for BLP and other associated initiatives is an evolving - but complex - picture, as it is involved in promoting a range of variables which involve the cognitive, social, strategic and emotional development of the students involved. As this is multi-faceted and longitudinal by nature, there are often difficulties in getting the sort of conclusive evidence needed to show that the approach is affective. Mannion and Mercer (2016) highlight this issue when they talk about the equivocal findings produced by many large-scale, whole school interventions on the effectiveness of BLP and other similar approaches to learning. However, rather than abandoning these approaches, Mannion and Mercer also point out that there is evidence in the research literature on L2L (see, for example, Dignath, Buettner, and Langfeldt, 2008; Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie, 1996; Whitebread, *et al,* 2013, 2015) that teaching and learning practices which are based on the principles of metacognition and self-regulation do have 'clear and consistent academic gains' for the students involved, and that the issues with large-scale initiatives are not because the approach is flawed but can be attributed more to how the interventions are conceived, implemented and who is responsible for them (2016,p50). Claxton is aware of these issues, and his evidence base is generally focused on the effectiveness of specific elements of BLP. However, he would argue that there is a developing cumulative case for the effectiveness of BLP, not only from the approach itself but also from other similar habit-based initiatives, all of which, he believes, 'gives us increasing confidence that the approach is having beneficial results' (Claxton *et al.* 2011, 2018).

3.6.1 Academic outcomes

Evidence for the effectiveness of L2L strategies, like BLP, appears in a range of research including several meta-analyses', however, more specific arguments in favour of BLP appear in 'grey'[1] literature, much of which is explored in Claxton *et al's* (2011) *Learning Powered School.* This includes external evaluations and action research projects produced by Education Action Zones (EAZs), Local Education Authorities (LEAs), education companies such as TLO and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL).

3.6.1.1 Support for L2L

Support for L2L more generally stretches back to the 1970s and 80s as shown in Hattie, Biggs and Purdie's (1996) meta-analysis on the effects of learning skills interventions on student learning. They looked at over fifty studies from between 1976 and 1992 on the effects of L2L techniques on a range of student outcomes which is summarised as performance, study skills and affect. Overall, Hattie *et al.* argue that L2L strategies have an average effect size of 0.57 on student academic performance (1996, p128), which means, on average, such interventions can help a student to add months to their progress. Hattie *et al.* continue that the best student outcomes originated from programmes which used metacognition as their basis, in which student motivation to learn is also addressed, and in which the strategies are taught in context and did not rely on one-off L2L lessons (*ibid*, p128).

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[1] Research and materials collected outside the traditional academic publishing

One of the studies cited by Hattie *et al.* (1996) is Feuerstein and colleagues (1981, 2003, 2010, 2012) research into structured cognitive modifiability and instrumental enrichment. Feuerstein's work is particularly important as it is cited as inspiring elements of Costa and Kallick's 'Habits of Mind'. Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer, (2013) also highlight the association which BLP and other similar initiatives have with Feuerstein's theory. Aimed in the first instance at students with significant learning needs from low socio-economic backgrounds (but usable with all students at any level), Feuerstein believed it was possible to improve a student's cognitive abilities through Instrumental Enrichment which was a learn-to learn type programme which included the development of thinking routines, habits, metacognitive and self-regulative techniques.

The study cited by Hattie *et al.* (1996) looked at the learning outcomes from two groups of students: one group was given an Instrumental Enrichment course and the other, the control group, carried on with their curriculum studies as normal. The results were interesting, for despite having less content focused lessons, the research group performed as well as the control group in assessments and in some cases outperformed them. However, more telling was the follow up study made two years later, in which, as part of their enlistment into the Israeli Army, the same students were given an intelligence tests (DAPAR), the results of which still showed a significant difference in favour of the research group (p<.001). The researchers acknowledge that more than one assessment of intelligence is needed to test for cognitive change and that none of this evidence supplies any conclusive proof for the effectiveness of the Instrumental Enrichment program (Feuerstein *et al.* 1981, p199ff). Since the time of this study, the effectiveness of Feuerstein's theory of Structured Cognitive Modifiability has gained

a large peer-reviewed evidence base (see for example, Feuerstein, Hoffman, *et al.* 1985; Feuerstein, 2003; Feuerstein, and Lewin-Benham, 2012; Feuerstein, Feuerstein, and Falik, 2010; Shay, 2017). The evidence now shows that Feuerstein's methods, often against the odds, do work for many students who encounter them.

Research from a more recent meta-analysis carried out by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research [CCSR] (Farrington, *et al.* 2012) argues that there are is a chain of noncognitive factors which shape students' academic performance; the noncognitive factors are academic behaviour, academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies and social skills (see Blackwell *et al*. 2007; Duckworth and Seligman 2005, 2017; Heckman, 2008; Zimmerman and Schunk, 1989). Academic performance, they suggest, is precipitated by academic behaviours (including participation in lessons, completion of homework, time dedicated to personal study and preparation) but cautions that these factors can only be developed indirectly through the promotion of other noncognitive factors: positive mindsets and learning strategies. Therefore, in a classroom context any attempts to try and change the academic behaviours of students and their ability to persevere must be made through the promotion of self-efficacy, positive self-concept, and the teaching of learning strategies such as self-regulation (*ibid,* p39). One of the studies used by Farrington *et al.* (2012) is that undertaken by Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) which demonstrates the importance of self-regulation as a learning strategy. Their research shows a significant link between self-regulation and academic performance attained as result of seatwork and assessments ($p<.001$). The importance of self-regulation is also echoed in a meta-analysis produced by Dignath *et al*. 2008, in which the overall effect size (the difference a specific strategy can make

in the classroom) of self-regulation was a high 0.62 on performance; Hattie describes anything above 0.4 has having a positive effect on student learning (Corwin Visible Learning, 2020).

Often linked closely to self-regulation is metacognition and, in an even more recent meta-analysis of over fifty studies, Perry, Lundie and Golder (2019) conclude that when done effectively, the teaching of metacognitive knowledge and skills can have a positive impact on student academic outcomes across a range of subject areas (see Baas *et al*. 2015; Van der Stel and Veenman 2008; Veenman, Hout-Wolters, and Afflerbach 2006). As part of their analysis, they refer to the work of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) which rank metacognition and self-regulation as number one for educational effectiveness. With a high effect size of 0.62, the EFF claim that metacognition and self-regulation strategies can add - on average - around eight month's progress to the expected rate of progress for a student (EEF, 2016). The importance of metacognition and self-regulation is also supported by Hattie's 'Visible Learning' 2018 meta-analysis which ranks metacognition and self-regulation as having high effects on student process, with an effect size of 0.60 and 0.52 respectively (Corwin Visible Learning Metax, no date).

Also cited by Perry *et al.* (2019) are studies such as Mannion and Mercer (2016) which report the success of a three-year longitudinal evaluation of the introduction of a whole-school L2L programme at a state secondary school. This study followed a cohort of 118 students from years 7 to 9 (2010–2014) which was taught a teacher designed L2L programme and included separate L2L lessons and a focus of embedding, what they term, 'learning skills' explicitly in

subject lessons. Compared to the matched control group, the results of the L2L cohort showed a significant impact ($p<0.001$) on student outcomes with a 10% increase of the proportion of students either hitting or exceeding their target grades at the end of Year 9. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds made the most pronounced improvement by closing the gap with their more affluent peers by 25% compared to 5% in the control group (2016, pp1, 16 and 19). Mannion and Mercer argue that this evidence of increased student outcomes shows that the multifaceted nature of the L2L programme introduced at the school 'may have aggregated and interacted to produce significant overall gains in subject learning' (2016, p19). As yet, there is no evidence that this programme of learning skills could be scaled up but, as Perry *et al.* state, 'the evidence is both strong and compelling' (2019, p9).

3.6.1.2 Specific evidence for BLP

More specific evidence for the effectiveness of BLP comes from a range of external evaluations and action research projects. Commissioned by Solihull LEA in 2008, one such evaluation was carried out on a group of primary and secondary schools which had introduced and worked with BLP for two years. Causal links between BLP and academic outcomes were difficult to prove, but many of the schools involved claimed that BLP had helped to improve academic outcomes (Claxton *et al*. 2011, p256).

Other examples of more specific support for BLP (also cited by Claxton, *et al.*) come from action research projects such as that funded by Cardiff LEA between 2001–2005. During this time over 160 BLP action research projects in primary and secondary phases of education were

carried out. The findings of these projects appeared in four published reports called *Learning to Learn: Enquires into Building Resourceful, Resilient and Reflective Learners.*

Whilst much of what was produced from these projects focuses on more non-cognitive outcomes, such as listening and resilience, some did focus on academic achievement. One project entitled 'How well did I do in Maths today?' investigated how a teacher could encourage his students to be more reflective in their learning and to improve their attainment in Maths by revising, distilling, and understanding themselves better as learners (meta-learning). The teacher had observed that his students tended to make the same mistakes repeatedly in assessments no matter how many times he gave them the same feedback. To try and rectify this issue he decided to introduce a self-evaluation strategy in which the students analysed their errors. He used two groups of the same age to gather data: the test group was given time to reflect and analyse their assessed work by filling in a 'Where did I go wrong' sheet, and the control group was given normal feedback to read. Over the course of several assessments the test group's average results became consistently higher (presumably because they got used to analysing their work) than that of the control group, having started out at being around the same level. The teacher concluded that the differences between the two classes indicated that self-evaluation, which involved analysis of mistakes, 'can be of great benefit in improving children's performance in Mathematics Assessments' (Cardiff, 2002, p138). He also commented that he has seen evidence to suggest that a student can be empowered to think more for themselves through the project.

More research which focused on the effect BLP which could have on Mathematical attainment was carried out by the West Coast Teaching Alliance (WCTA), who, under the auspices of the 2014 National College for School Leadership (NCSL) Closing the Gap research projects, led a small-scale, non-randomised feasibility study. The project investigated the teaching of multiplication using a metacognitive approach which focused on developing the BLP questioning and linking learning habits. Although only small scale and of short duration, the project saw changes in the learning behaviours of the students, and the researchers state the BLP learning intervention had 'a significant impact on pupils' maths attainment, confidence, and independence in problem solving' (NCSL, 2014). Compared to the control group, the intervention also generated an effect size of 0.66 on academic performance which showed that the intervention added - on average - around eight months in progress (TLO, Personal Correspondence). As this was a small-scale study with only six participating schools, what it proves is limited; however, for the researchers involved it did highlight that BLP was a learning intervention which warranted further investigation (TLO, no date. *Recent Research*).

Evidence which also supports the potential effectiveness of BLP on academic results comes from a school in the North East of England, which had been embedding the principles of BLP into the framework of their school for several years. The school reports that their A-level Biology students did not understand what the issue was when, after the first examination, they discovered that over 3,000 other students had signed an online protest that the paper had been too difficult and unfair. Claxton describes their students as having 'studied and prepared for the exam using BLP principles, to try another tack if their first one failed, to take time to reflect on their learning, and to stay calm and make the best use of whatever they already

knew' (Claxton *et al.* 2011, p250). When the results came out, the students did much better in the examination than their peers, with 77% achieving a grade A-C, compared to 55% in similar schools, and 42% getting a grade A compared to 22% of students in similar schools *(ibid).* Whilst this event cannot be counted as conclusive evidence towards the effectiveness of BLP on academic outcomes, Claxton argues that there is emerging cumulative support for the effectiveness of BLP.

3.6.1.3 Evidence of impact on wider student outcomes

Much of the research which supports learning habit approaches to learning, such as BLP is carried out primarily to see how it might positively affect student academic achievement. However, for Claxton, the point of BLP is not just to improve academic outcomes, but to enable students to develop into 'powerful, confident real-life learners' (Claxton 2008, p121). Evidence of the impact on wider student outcomes is often generated as part of studies which are also looking at academic achievement. This has led to a body of evidence which supports some of the multi-faceted aspects of BLP and other similar strategies of learning on wider student outcomes such as perseverance, self-efficacy, self-concept and motivation.

Farrington *et al.* (2012) highlight the symbiotic relationship between self-efficacy, self-concept, and the use of self-regulation teaching strategies. Perry *et al.* (2018) also quote several studies (see Maclellan 2014; Stankov, Morony, and Lee, 2014) which suggest a positive link between students' increased use of metacognitive learning strategies and self-confidence. They also point out that there is some well-established research supporting the relationship between

motivation and the teaching of metacognitive learning strategies (see McCombs and Marzano. 1990; Ottenhoff 2011; Zimmerman and Moylan, 2009). Dignath, Buettner, and Langfeldt (2008) claim, in their meta-analysis of self-regulation training programmes increased gains in student motivation towards learning with a high effect size of 0.76.

Research carried out by the Character Lab led by Duckworth also supports the idea that developing and acting on a positive attitude to learning can affect student outcomes: The Lab has investigated the effect of teaching resilience and self-control (Duckworth, *el al.* 2007, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2019). The idea that students can be taught to be more resilient in their learning is also supported by research (see Aronson, Fried and Good, 2002; and Aronson, Good and Inzlicht, 2003); however, these studies lack any data on whether the teaching of resilience could affect student outcomes other than academic achievement. Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007) address this issue through a longitudinal field study which looks into the effects of teaching an incremental theory of intelligence (growth mindset) on student core beliefs about intelligence: the study has several aims, but the second study conducted by the team looked specifically at the effect teaching an incremental theory of intelligence could have on student motivational behaviour. After the intervention, the study reports that students in the experimental group showed an increased interested in learning (15% as opposed to only 2% of the control group, $p<.05$) and more of an increased effort in learning (23% as opposed to 7% of control group, $p<.05$) (Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck, 2007, p257). Although the literature about the effectiveness of growth mindset interventions is mixed (see Li and Bates, 2017; Rienzo *et al.* 2015), a recent large-scale randomized controlled trial which involved over 12,000 students, showed that growth mindset interventions can have a positive effect on

student attitudes to learning, self-concept and self-efficacy. More specifically, the pervasive fixed mindset attitude amongst lower-achieving adolescent students was reduced by the growth mindset intervention, $p < 0.001$, (Yeager, D.S., Hanselman, P., Walton, G.M. *et al.* 2019).

More specific support for the effectiveness for BLP on non-academic outcomes comes from the Cardiff LEA action research projects (2001-2005). Whilst not offering definitive proof several themes emerge from the data: for example, many teacher comments to the effect that it cannot be assumed that a student knows how to listen well, how to persevere or how to revise and that a teacher should include the teaching and development of such learning habits as part of their lessons as well as subject content. If a teacher wants a student to be more independent, they cannot assume this will just happen, but instead must give the student opportunities to be independent and that this is part of the classroom discussions just as much as learning a subject content. That it is possible to improve the learning behaviours of students in individual classes but to affect whole school change needs systemic change which is more difficult to achieve (Cardiff, 2002).

3.7 Criticism of BLP and other metacognitive strategies

3.7.1 Learning to learn is a vacuous concept

In his article '*Learning how to Learn: a critique*' Winch puzzles over what is meant by the concept of L2L, why it is needed and if it even exists. He states, 'if a human baby has an innate capacity to learn to speak, then surely it does not need an acquired ability to do so in addition' (2008, p650). If L2L, he continues, is 'taken to mean that we need to acquire a capacity to learn' then this is a vacuous concept 'since we necessarily have this if we are to learn anything'

(2008, p649). Winch's points are echoed by Tricot and Sweller who argue that the L2L skills are acquired through 'biologically primary knowledge', like learning to speak or engage in social relations: we are not taught these things, but they occur naturally 'as a consequence of membership of a normal society' (2014, p265). Learning to read, for example, is described as 'biologically secondary knowledge,' arguing that reading does need to be taught, as it will not occur naturally. Winch also objects to the related idea that L2L is a general ability of the mind which can be used across all subject areas. Abilities, he argues, are domain specific and cannot be applied across all subject matters. His objection is echoed by other writers such Daisy Christodoulou claims that it is naïve to assume that skills learnt in one subject can automatically be used in another. Using Hirsch's analogy of scrambled eggs, she writes that skills and knowledge, are just like scrambled eggs: in the same way you cannot unscramble an egg, you cannot unscramble knowledge and skills (2014, p20).

Winch (2008) considers further what could be considered as a general ability of the mind and therefore a transferable skill by looking at a selection of likely candidates. Two of these are

- Forming and testing hypothesis
- Abduction and integration

As a candidate for a general ability of mind in his discussions of Forming and testing hypothesis' Winch cites Chomsky (1988) and Fodor (1975) stating that they are wrong to assert that humans have an innate ability, as part of our neurological wiring, to form and test hypotheses and that this ability occurs automatically. Winch argues that if this ability is innate, it is a capacity, and, if humans already possess this capacity, they do not also need 'an acquired

ability to form and test hypotheses, for such a capacity would preclude the need for an ability to learn how to learn' (2008, p654). Winch continues that an ability to form and test hypotheses is not a suitable candidate for L2L as a general ability of the mind, as its use needs to be taught. It is also used in specific contexts, such as Science, in which its use is 'grounded in detailed subject knowledge and rigorous techniques, which only an expert in a specific area can use to acquire significant new knowledge' (*ibid*).

The ability to abduct is also suggested as a candidate for L2L, as it is the ability necessary to make judgements, decisions, inferences and solve problems. Winch asserts that 'we must have an innate capacity to do this' which develops with age and maturity. However, this cannot be the 'general mental power' needed for L2L, as abduction is the 'mark of mature human rationality' and, although making rational judgments requires a lot of learning, it does not require the acquisition of an ability to learn how to learn' (2008, p656).

Winch objects to the idea of L2L as a general ability, but he accepts the possibility that 'there are […] skills, dispositions and virtues whose acquisition and exercise may well make attempts to learn more effective' (2008, p663). He writes about how learning is not always easy, and that the development of confidence, persistence and independence are vitally important to make learning more effective. However, he goes on to say that the 'development of appropriate attitudes and virtues is one of the most ancient aims of both formal and informal education' (*ibid*, p663) and is nothing new. He adds that schools need to look anew at what they are doing to see if it can be improved, rather than 'cast around for such desperate

remedies as an ability that has never been recognised before and cannot be intelligibly described, despite many attempts to do so' (*ibid*).

Winch's objection to L2L reflects a commonly held view, and Claxton accepts that it is naive to state that skills can be taught to transfer spontaneously from one subject to another; however, Claxton argues that it is wrong to assume that some skills - such as curiosity and imagination - cannot be helped to become more generic and applicable to differing subjects. Claxton writes that

> curiosity obviously takes different forms in different subjects. But there is no reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater and dismiss the whole notion of cultivating general learning habits (2018, p184).

Winch's initial objections reflect a narrow view of L2L which is based on the flawed assumption that students need to be taught how to learn before they can learn. However, BLP does not aim to develop a capacity which we all naturally possess, but to help students become more effective learners. A useful way of seeing this is presented by Shaw when he suggests

> we may all be born ready to learn, just as we are ready to breathe or move. But we can learn skills to control our breathing and move with athleticism and grace. The skills behind learning require attention, too (2012).

The idea that students need to be supported in their learning reflects Winch's only workable candidate for L2L based on the 'acquisition and exercise' of skills, disposition and virtues which can make learning more effective (2008, p663). The value of teaching learning habits is not

based on a notion of acquiring a 'general ability to learn' but on the way such learning habits can help students develop the strategies and tactics needed for better learning, the ability to self-regulate their own learning and the importance for learning of developing a positive self-concept. Winch is still dismissive of L2L as he concludes that none of these concerns are new. His point is true, but it seems common sense to observe that if the development of learning habits leads to better student outcomes, then there is still a need for educators to address these issues.

3.7.2 BLP is a type of therapeutic education

In their book, *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* (2008), Ecclestone and Hayes argue that any activity is therapeutic 'which focuses on perceived emotional problems and which aims to make educational content and learning more "emotionally engaging"' (2008, px). They continue that any activity which focuses on the emotional encourages students to become inward, anxious, and depressed rather than outward, optimistic, and resilient. They also claim that therapeutic education leads to classrooms in which teachers try to make learning as light touch as possible, so that student self-esteem is not compromised, and where the academic education of the students is undermined (*ibid* p47, p83). Included under their therapeutic umbrella is any 'interest in personalised learning, student voice, learning to learn and assessing transferable skills' (Didau, 2016). BLP is also named specifically by Ecclestone and Hayes as a form of therapeutic education, and they quote Claxton when they write that schools need to take into consideration the emotional needs of its students and develop strategies to help them develop the learning habits needed for life-long learning. BLP they believe 'erodes the belief that people need subject knowledge,' and the development of

learning dispositions 'reduces subject knowledge to eliciting knowledge about feelings' *(ibid*. p45).

With its focus on the students, with teachers being encouraged to plan lessons with both classroom relationships and environment in mind to promote active listening, empathy, collaboration, self-reflection, and self-regulation as integral parts of the teaching and learning process, BLP does seem to be a type of therapeutic education. This link is compounded when Claxton writes

> The point of BLP is not to raise conventional results; it is to expand the range of valued outcomes to include the development of the confidence and capacity to learn all kinds of things, out of school as well as in. Expanding young people's capacity to learn, and their appetite for learning, is seen as a valuable end of education in its own right; not just as a way of improving scores on existing indicators (Claxton *et al.* 2011, p245).

Mintz comments that Ecclestone and Hayes are right that teachers need to be encouraged to question any assumptions made about the nature and role of education, but that they do not acknowledge some of the 'encouraging elements of the educational programmes they discuss' (Mintz, 2009, p636). BLP is an example of such a programme: while it is arguably therapeutic by developing the emotional and social aspects of learning, it is not anti-knowledge, as it also focuses on the cognitive and strategic aspects of learning. As Claxton argues, BLP sits mid-way between the progressive and traditional views of education, and, although his view of education is wider than just its effect on examination results, he does not deny its role in improving academic outcomes.

What is also worth pointing out is that any teacher knows that there is more to teaching than just passing on knowledge, and that to help students achieve their academic potential, emotional issues and well-being must be considered. There is some truth that back in 2008 there may have been 'therapeutic' practices which went too far (for example, to preserve student self-esteem some primary schools adopted the practice of having no losers at sports day). However, to remove any consideration of emotional issues and well-being from education goes against common sense and the concerns of current and subsequent governments who all shared the view that students who suffer from emotional issues can struggle to learn (see for example, DfE 2012, PHE 2014, DfE 2018, DfE 2019).

3.7.3 Children need knowledge

One of the criticisms of therapeutic education is the idea that it negates the need to teach knowledge. The idea that the teaching of learning habits takes away from teaching factual content is pursued by a number of other educational writers such as Christodoulou who, influenced by the work of Hirsch, claims that programmes like BLP teach children to assume 'that transferable skills negate the need to learn facts' (2014, p73). Quoting Hirsch, she argues that knowledge is a skill, and any method which encourages the teaching of skills - whether that be in a distinct lesson, or as part an explicit part of subject lessons - is creating 'a false dichotomy' between knowledge and skills.

Christodoulou is not alone in arguing for a knowledge-rich curriculum, and she argues that if students 'commit knowledge to memory and practise retrieving it from memory, that will

cause skilled performance' (*ibid*, pp79-80). She alludes to cognitive load theory (CLT) which has gained more currency in educational practice over the last few years, particularly by its inclusion in the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019). CLT, as advocated by Sweller (see 1998, 2010), argues that our working memory (the part of the brain which deals with whatever we are currently involved in) can only deal with so much new information at a time. Cognitive overload occurs when a student is given too much information to digest which can then compromise how effectively they can learn the information. One way to bypass cognitive overload, according to the theory, is to seek ways in which to move information into the long-term memory, which can then be drawn upon for learners to understand any new information. However, the importance of knowledge is vital, because if a student does not have enough subject knowledge stored in their long-term memory or that knowledge is only partial, it can also lead to cognitive load and a failure of the working memory (Willingham, 2006, 2009).

Those responsible for more recent advocations of the use of learning habits in the classroom emphasise that knowledge is important and that the teaching of these habits does not detract from the acquisition of knowledge. Claxton for example, argues that the development of learning habits should be cleverly interwoven into the fabric of a lesson in which 'knowledge acquisition and skill development are not involved in a tug-of-war for time and attention; they are the warp and weft of learners' everyday experience' (2018, p185). Petty echoes Claxton's views by asserting that Christodoulou is wrong to say that teaching skills do not help a student learn facts any better. He cites the results of the meta-analysis of fifty studies carried out by Hattie, Biggs and Purdie which shows that teaching students to be metacognitively aware of their own learning can have positive effects on a range of student outcomes. Petty argues

> In the nature of systematic reviews, only the best evidence was used. In each case there was a control group who were not taught the skills so that comparisons could be made between not teaching skills and teaching them. Those who were taught skills did very much better in assessments of the understanding of the content taught (2015).

Mannion and McAllister make the point that the emphasis on knowledge-rich curricula makes the case for the development of learning skills more important and not less. They argue for this by asking what is meant by a knowledge-rich curriculum: ‘does it mean skill-poor, or does knowledge-rich mean skill-rich because skills are rooted in knowledge?’ (2020, p87). They define a skill as ‘the ability to use either declarative or procedural knowledge for a purpose and to a high standard, through repeated practice’ *(ibid,* p88). Knowing how something is done does not mean that if you act on the knowledge you are an expert, as expertise in something takes repeated practice. Skills are rooted in knowledge, but their teaching also has its own vocabulary of ‘knowledge, skills, habits and dispositions’ which the students ‘would not otherwise learn through a purely subject-based curriculum’ (*ibid,* p88).

Christodoulou’s focus on the acquisition of knowledge can be understood from the CLT perspective, but this does not mean there is no need for the development of learning skills or habits. Mccrea’s *Memorable Teaching* is a guide for teachers on the topic of CLT and memory, and one of his key points is the role of metacognition. He argues that the teaching of knowledge is important, but that, on its own, it is not enough to ensure student buy-in to the learning process. Teachers, Mccrea continues, can have a significant effect on students’ learning through the way new information is presented, but if time is not given to developing

students' self-regulation and views of themselves as learners, this can limit how a student approaches their learning (2017, p99). If a student is encouraged to have a more positive view of themselves as a learner and they are provided with strategies to be more resilient, it can free up the working memory to focus on the knowledge they are required to learn.

The limitations that students bring to their learning are also highlighted by Mannion and McAllister who argue that just teaching subject knowledge is not enough, because 'being knowledgeable by itself doesn't insulate you against fear' (Mannion and McAllister, 2020 p349). This is a very important point to make and one which is not really acknowledged by those who support a knowledge-rich curriculum. Many students are often frightened of contributing to lessons or participating in an activity because of a fear of failure and a lack of self-efficacy. Teaching learning skills can systematically help students to challenge these fears and enable them to see what is possible for them *(ibid,* pp349ff).

Writers such as Christodoulou in fact polarise the debate between knowledge and skills, which is unnecessary as both are needed for a student to be a successful learner. The idea that knowledge is sufficient is also short-sighted, as it does not take into consideration what a student may or may not bring to their learning. As with Ecclestone and Hayes, Christodoulou does not seem to appreciate that people are not robots, but human beings with all the emotional baggage that entails, and that if a teacher wants to ensure that their students have any chance of achieving their potential, they need to deal with students' thoughts and feelings as well as teach subject content.

3.7.4 Equivocal Evidence

As noted, there is a substantive amount of evidence which supports the effectiveness of small-scale research on metacognition and self-regulation in learning; however, as noted by Mannion and Mercer (2016), the evidence produced by many of the large-scale, whole school interventions designed to evaluate the effectiveness of L2L, is frequently ambiguous with no clear evidence of either positive or negative impact (2016, p4ff). BLP is named as one such initiative and Mannion comments that in Claxton *et al's The Learning Powered School* they gather a range of evidence including action research projects, external evaluation, inspection reports and student attainment in SATs and GCSEs. In terms of student attainment, the results published for both SATs and GCSE show a mixed picture, with some positive evidence of the impact of BLP. However, as Mannion states 'it is not clear how these schools were sampled from the thousands using BLP, and the results have not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal' (Mannion, 2018, p46).

Claxton's response to a lack of evidence of this kind is to argue that BLP is a complex and multidimensional approach to learning which does not lend itself to the accumulation of the type of evidence valued by journals. He argues

> it is very hard to draw hard and fast inferences about the effects of each single strand. (A thick rope is strong because so many threads are woven together, and you can't easily detect the contribution that each individual strand is making) (Claxton, 2018, p157).

When asked about the issue of evidence, Chambers, the Commercial Director of TLO, writes 'I'm afraid BLP lives in the world of real schools and learners and has only very rarely bumped into the world of researchers and statistics' (personal correspondence, 2020).

Mannion and Mercer go on to argue that the issue with the equivocal nature of the evidence for initiatives such as BLP may not be the fault of the initiative itself, but a consequence of the way such programmes are implemented. For example, the outcomes of an initiative could be affected by the number of schools involved, how many teachers are involved, the extent of teacher buy-in from top-down initiatives, how motivated the staff involved are, and whether the learning initiative is treated as an add-on or as an integral part of lessons. Much of the positive evidence for L2L tends to come from meta-analyses of small-scale projects which, by their very nature, are much easier to control and where more of a causal relationship between the initiative and the results can be established (Mannion and Mercer, 2016, p4-5, 21).

3.7.5 BLP cannot be measured

Another criticism of BLP is that the learning habits themselves cannot be measured, which leads some critics to dismiss the approach as it is not possible to be sure whether the teacher's effort was worth it or not. This issue is raised by Perry *et al.* when they note that one of the limitations with the literature on the use of metacognition in the classroom is the issue of measurement: tools such as questionnaires and inventories are weakened by the lack of a common assessment criteria for metacognition and most, if not all, rely on self-reporting which can be unreliable. Despite this, Perry *et al.* argue

> there are numerous studies presenting evidence, which we find convincing, that when metacognitive strategies are carefully used in classrooms, then most pupils will be able to improve their academic performance; this, in turn, makes most pupils feel better and leads them to be more motivated in the future (2018, p21).

The difficulty with measurement is also acknowledged by Claxton, but he does not think this to be insurmountable when he writes, 'while it is true that it is hard to think about how to evidence the development of resilience or concentration, and it is, to many people, an unfamiliar question, it is far from impossible' (2018, p186). To demonstrate his point, Claxton refers to two methods of assessment that have been developed. The first is Carr's (2002, 2013) early years 'learning stories' which are multimedia learning portfolios designed to record a child's progress in their approach to learning which are then used to help the child develop a metacognitive approach to their learning. The second is the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI), which is a self-report questionnaire designed to track the development of learning power. Originally designed by Claxton and Broadfoot, it has subsequently been tested and trailed by Deakin-Crick and colleagues (2004, 2007, 2015) and they argue it has produced valid and reliable data for students in KS2 and KS3. Based on his own research with Carr (2002) and more recently in the work of Duckworth and Yeager (2015), Claxton suggests that all methods of evidencing development in the learning habits have their issues, but by adopting a bricolage-type approach, which uses both quantitative and qualitative data, it is possible to 'provide robust and reliable evidence' (2018, p186).

Mannion and McAllister take a different perspective on the issue of measurement and argue that an important measure for L2L type strategies should be based on 'existing indicators', or academic performance and improved exam results. L2L may well have other measurements, but if an intervention does not lead to an improvement in academic outcomes, it is impossible to say that teaching learning skills has helped the students to become better learners. They also believe that to produce a measurement for L2L other than academic results would cause more issues than it solves (2020, p81ff).

3.8 Concluding remarks

The importance of metacognition and self-regulation for learning is well documented in the literature (for example, Dignath, Buettner and Langfedt, 2008; Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie, 1996; Perry *et al.* 2019). BLP, as a way of developing a metacognitive classroom environment, has a strong pedigree, and has been influenced by many eminent educational thinkers and educational concepts. However, there is an issue between the proven effectiveness for learning of metacognition and self-regulation and the often-equivocal results of large-scale BLP research projects based on the same principles. Mannion and Mercer comment that these issues may be the result, for example, of how an initiative is implemented and not the fault directly of the initiative itself (2016, p.4ff). Claxton defends BLP by arguing that it is not a magic bullet and any implementation needs time and careful consideration (Claxton, 2018, p204). Mannion and McAllister also echo this sentiment; they argue that such initiatives are multifaceted and complex, but this does not mean they are not worth the time, quite the opposite (2020, p73, 99).

My initial interest in a connection between BLP, and RE as personal development, came from the realisation, which was confirmed by Claxton, that although BLP was not marketed as a form of spirituality, it was inspired by Buddhist principles of being a powerful learner: to understand ourselves, to be open-minded and attentive. If BLP was based on these principles, I wondered how far it could act as a tool to engage students in RE as personal development. I was further encouraged that there might be a productive link between BLP and RE as personal development when I read Deakin-Crick and Jelfs' (2011) article which explores the links between spiritual development and learning to learn. More recently the work by Larkin *et al.* (2020) also confirmed that the development of metacognition in the classroom can have a particular use in RE. This research echoes my own, when they claim that metacognition can help students to build self-knowledge, which may, in turn, help encourage engagement in dialogue with others. Larkin *et al.* however, seek to do this through the establishment of a new approach to RE based on the academic study of religion(s) and worldview(s) where, in their view, there would be no need 'to promote any form of personal, human, spiritual, moral, social or cultural development' (2020, p20). Unlike Larkin *et al.* I believe that developing student reflexivity *is* part of what personal development means, and is therefore one of the central facets of good RE.

CHAPTER 4:

EXISTENTIAL THINKING

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the role of BLP as a specific conception of L2L to show that, despite having a strong pedigree, its application in the classroom and any proven effectivenes s is a complex and multifaceted picture. Despite this, I agree with the comment made by Mannion and McAllister (2020) that while some may not see L2L approaches as educationally valuable, the research on the positive impact that teaching metacognition and self-regulation has is clear, and it is therefore worth taking the time to research these methods further.

In this chapter I am going to explore firstly how RE as personal development relates to the wider school requirement to promote SMSC and particularly spirituality. Secondly, as an aim for RE, the meaning of 'personal development' and its relationship with existential thinking will also be explored. Thirdly, I will also consider the potential links between the BLP learning habits and existential thinking.

4.2 Personal Development

The personal development approach to education reflects a view that the nature and aims of education are more than just the learning of a body of knowledge, and that personal development is also about the impact the learning can have on a student's life. The 1988 Education Reform Act stated that the school curriculum should promote 'the spiritual, moral,

cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society' (p1), and the focus on personal development is re-emphasised in the 1992 Act in which the more familiar language of 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural' (SMSC) was used and, with the establishment of Ofsted, became the basis on how schools are inspected.

As a facet of personal development, SMSC informed all aspects of school life and was delivered across all curriculum subjects. The requirement for SMSC across the curriculum was re-affirmed in subsequent Education Acts and Ofsted Inspection Frameworks and Handbooks (see for example, Ofsted 2013, 2016). In the 2019 Ofsted Inspection Handbook, the importance of SMSC was elevated further, and continues to play a key role in the personal development judgement for schools in 2022.

As a strand of SMSC, spiritual development is one way in which personal development can be articulated. What spiritual development means, and how it is to be delivered across the curriculum, has provoked considerable debate over the years, and Eaude defines it as 'elusive and hard to pin down' (2008, p4). However, in the 1994 Ofsted produced a discussion paper entitled *Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development* which gave guidance on what spirituality means:

> Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of enduring reality. 'Spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious;' all areas of the curriculum may contribute to spiritual development (Ofsted, 1994, p8).

Ofsted's emphasis on spiritual development being cross-curricular, and not being synonymous with religion, is reflected in their most recent criteria which say that spiritual development should give students opportunities to experience a 'sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them' (2022). RE is not the only way in which spiritual development should be promoted, but due to the subject's content it plays a significant role. RE as personal development, as the name suggests, places a great importance on student development in all aspects of SMSC and particularly spiritual development. This can be seen in the use of the term 'personal development' in the work of Grimmitt (1987), which is explicitly linked to a spiritual, religious, and moral approach to ultimate questions.

4.3 What is existential thinking?

Despite spiritual development being a fundamental part of SMSC, to avoid any misunderstanding of what RE as personal development is trying to achieve, I decided instead to use the term existential thinking as the basis of personal development in RE. Existential questions can be explored in other subjects in a purely scientific and philosophical manner (Billingsley, 2019), but as expressed in the writings of Grimmitt (1987) and Teece (2008, 2009, 2010a) what is key to RE as personal or human development is an engagement with key existential questions and ideas, to not only develop the students understanding of religion and worldviews, but also for them, where appropriate, to learn personally from what they discover.

As a concept, existential thinking is related to spirituality; it can be applied in religious, spiritual, and secular frameworks, and can contribute to a student's capacity for self-awareness (Rumianowska, 2019). However, unlike spirituality, it does not share the same issues or connotations with religiosity and therefore, most, if not all, people could relate to the sorts of questions and issues generated by existential thinking. Individual participation may come more easily to some than others, depending on their culture, upbringing, and individual personality traits. Children, in particular, may not always be encouraged to think in such a way, but existential questions are integral to the human experiences of life, and are often the reason - whether consciously or not - for many human rituals, behaviour, and beliefs.

The term 'existential thinking' is used by Nasal to describe how an individual might respond to existential questions, such as the existence of an afterlife or the meaning and purpose of life (2004, p48). Nobandegani *et al.* (2015) and McCoog (2010) all agree that existential thinking is an exclusive construct which does not assume the development of any spiritual states or the attainment of any spiritual goals. Allan and Shearer describe existential thinking as the 'process of considering existential issues and engaging in meaning-making' (2012, p23). Those engaged in the process of existential thinking can do so in several distinct, but related, frameworks ranging from the secular to the religious, where they have the freedom to interpret and respond to the questions and issues in any way they choose.

Inevitably, existential thinking as an idea draws from the diverse body of literature and thinkers that is existentialism: to explore existential questions is life enhancing and therefore

important, that the individual can create their own meaning (or are at least free to interpret meaning within their own religious tradition), and the idea that humans live in relation to others and the world around them. However, of itself, existential thinking is not a form of existentialism. Students are not being taught they should become existentialists, nor are they being told what they should or should not believe. The term 'existential thinking' is a much broader concept than existentialism, since existential thinking does not adhere to, or promote, any particular existential ideas or values, but encompasses any attempt to address the big questions in life such as 'Where do we come from?', 'Is there life after death?' and 'What is the meaning of life?'. Existential thinking is, as Allan and Shearer state, 'the tendency to explore the fundamental concerns of human existence and the capacity to engage in a meaning-making process that locates oneself in respect to those issues' (2012, p21). Existential thinking is not the objective, academic thinking about how stars form or how old the universe is, but asks deep, philosophical questions which require some level of personal investment from those engaging with the questions.

4.4 Personal development and existential thinking

Hand's explanation of what he terms as inquiry into the meaning of life 'as an existentially-engaged search for meaning and value' (2012a, p8) is instructive in terms of personal development and its relationship with existential thinking. Although he promotes this inquiry as an alternative to confessional RE for faith schools, his views are similar to those advocated by Grimmitt and Teece for RE in all schools. Hand writes that his inquiry into the meaning of life would involve making 'hefty emotional and intellectual demands' on the students (2012a, p8) and this, I believe is exactly what can be offered by RE as personal development. In other

words, students are encouraged to engage with the responses to existential questions from the religious and worldviews they study. Through a process of critical debate, evaluation, and personal reflection, what they learn could enhance or change their worldview.

RE as personal development, using a religious and worldview framework, has clear existential characteristics in its aim to encourage students to explore and create relationships with existential questions and concepts. Teece's argument for RE as 'skilful means' is an example of this relationship where, through the study of religion as vehicles of human transformation, the student is encouraged to 'develop a wider and deeper understanding of what it is to be human' (Stolberg and Teece, 2010, p51). This process, by its very nature, can be both intellectually and emotionally challenging as it encourages the student to look beyond the subject content to engage with the key existential questions and issues it raises. The use of skilful means is when the student actively chooses from what they have learnt, and takes with them what is life enriching, inspiring and personally relevant to them, and leaves behind what is not (Teece, 2008, pp193ff).

Grimmitt's argument for spiritual awareness is also an example of students being able to explore and create relationships with existential questions. He describes RE as providing an avenue for students to reflect on the nature of shared human experiences (experiences common to religions and the individual), such as loss of status or death, and that, through a process of reflection and evaluation, a student can become more self-aware of their own values and beliefs (1987, p164). Grimmitt's earlier work, particularly in *What can I do in*

religion? (1973), explicitly promotes an existential approach in which the purpose of RE is to help create conceptual bridges between the existential experiences of the student and the religious material covered. Reflecting both a theological and educational agenda, Grimmitt writes that 'when we speak of the existential approach to RE we are referring to an approach which focuses attention on the whole of his experiences and uses these as the basis for forming religious concepts' (1973, p52). Through a process of existential analysis, the students are encouraged to peel back the surface of life (1973, p54), and they develop the skills, sensitivities and perceptions needed to engage with and understand 'the subjective religious consciences of committed people' (Grimmitt, 2000b, p31). The theological associations with Grimmitt's earlier existential approach may not be appropriate today, but Grimmitt's educational rationale for the approach is still applicable to modern RE and, helpfully, he writes that it is not necessary to accept the theological aspect of his approach for the process of existential analysis to be beneficial to the student's personal development (1973, pp51ff).

Grimmitt adds that such an existential view of religion does not ignore the revelatory nature of many world religions, nor does it reduce the idea of 'truth' to the outcome of an individual's life experiences and reflexivity. He writes that an understanding of religious 'truth' and the nature of revelation does not negate the need for these beliefs and values to be related to the life experiences of the individual. Indeed, for students with no religious background and even those with religious backgrounds, Grimmitt argues, religious concepts can only 'come alive' when students are able to relate to them through the whole of their life experiences. He writes

> when we speak of The Existential Approach to R.E. we are referring to an approach which focuses attention on the whole of the child's experiences, or,

> more precisely, which focuses the child's attention on the whole of his experiences and uses these as the basis for forming religious concepts (1973, p52).

The issues to do with preserving the integrity of religion are important, and this is highlighted by Easton *et al.* in their Critical Religious Education (CRE) which argues that RE which emphasises the personal development of the students can become too inward looking. They write that RE 'cannot be reduced to the level of mere self-expression', as this would undermine the integrity of the various truth claims made by religious traditions and worldviews. Instead, Easton *et al.* argue, students should be helped to express and develop their own viewpoints through a grounding in ontological realism and epistemic relativity. It is from this basis that students can critically explore the relationship of their views to other traditions both religious and secular, the process of which would require extensive existential enquiry and reflection. Easton *et al.* maintain that it is through this critical exploration that 'religious education should aim to empower students to make informed judgments about the ultimate nature of reality and the implications of this for the way in which they choose to live their lives' (2019, pp2ff).

4.5 What does good existential thinking look like?

As previously outlined, there is no sense in which existential thinking requires the development of any spiritual state: it can operate in both religious and non-religious frameworks; it does not promote a particular view or attitude towards the world and the idea of existence; and it is capable of contributing to a student's personal development, their developing self-awareness and ability to learn from the views of others. In order to answer my

research question, I needed to understand what good existential thinking looks like and how this could relate to the learning habits.

Good existential thinking in education relies on the teacher to maximise the opportunities in a curriculum for students to engage with existential issues, through the use of 'appropriate prompts' (Rumianowska, 2019, p265). As with spirituality, RE is not the only vehicle which could provide such prompts for existential thinking; however, as Grimmitt argues, the study of religion and worldviews provides perfect subject material for such engagement to occur, as it can problematise accepted ways of seeing the world and encourage students to be more critically aware of their views and beliefs (1987, pp140ff). The study of religion and worldviews enables students to engage with existential thinking in two ways: firstly, they can use the study of religions and worldviews as a basis in which to engage in their own personal reflection, evaluation and response to the issues studied, and secondly, through the study of religion, a student can develop their religious understanding, and become more adept at identifying and responding to existential questions derived directly from religious belief.

In the classroom, most students engage with the study of religion as a body of knowledge to be learnt; however, for existential thinking to be developed, there also needs to be a willingness from the student to see beyond the knowledge to the issues of value and meaning it conveys. A student good at existential thinking would be required to ask, reflect upon, challenge, and show some personal investment with such questions. Participation will vary from person to person, but someone good at existential thinking will be open to some form of

personal re-evaluation as a result of what they have studied (Rumianowska, 2019, pp264ff). In common with some of the proposed traits for an existential intelligence (King, 2008, 2010 and King and DeCicco, 2009) good existential thinking also involves an interest in exploring the big questions of life, such as what the purpose of life is, the possibility of an afterlife, and personal identity. A student should show a curiosity for such questions, and the willingness to look beyond sense experience for answers to them. A student who is a good existential thinker would not feel threatened by studying and learning from views which are different from their own. Instead, they would have the metacognitive abilities to monitor and evaluate their own thoughts and feelings. They would show an openness to changing their minds about what they value most and believe about in life. They would also be willing to engage in critical debate and would see a critical reflection on their own views, and those of others, as an opportunity to enrich their own. Other qualities required from a student good at existential thinking would involve the ability to listen to the views of others, to focus and notice details and to make links between what they do, or do not believe, and the ideas which they have studied.

A student who is not good at existential thinking would be one who struggles to be self-reflective and does not see that there are diverse ways of living and believing. Such students would not see the point of engaging in something which they perceive to be irrelevant to their view of life. Some students may also see the development of existential thinking as a threat to their sense of who they are and how they see the world. In the RE classroom, existential insecurity may explain the reticence of some students to engage with the lesson content on any level and, for some, the outright hostility towards the subject. A student's ability to engage with the ideas of others can also be their lack of metacognitive ability to monitor and evaluate

their own thoughts and feelings. Basic classroom expectations - such as the ability to listen and concentrate - can also affect how well a student can engage with existential thinking. A student's emotional or mental health may also interfere with their ability and willingness to engage with any existential questions and ideas.

It is clear that many of the qualities required of someone who is good at existential thinking are those which are also developed as part of Claxton's BLP, which can be powerful learning habits. I now explain these links further.

4.6 What are the links between existential thinking and BLP?

Initially my sense of a link between existential thinking and BLP were confirmed by Deakin-Crick and Jelfs description of BLP as a 'spiritually grounded pedagogy' (2011, p202), and in an article in the *Psychologist* in which Claxton talks about the Buddhist principles which have helped to influence the formation of BLP: curiosity and investigation. He comments that 'Buddhism is the only religion I know that requires you to doubt everything and inquire ceaselessly' (2012, p792).

As outlined in chapter 3, Claxton's BLP consists of four interrelated areas known as the '4Rs' – there is Resilience (the emotional aspect of learning), Resourcefulness (the cognitive aspect of learning), Reflection (the strategic aspect of learning) and Reciprocity (the social aspect of learning). Combined, they represent a holistic view of learning which aims to develop students' metacognition and self-regulation through the development of learning strategies, both

individual and communal, thinking skills and emotional learning. As a form of metacognition, BLP is addressing the 'person' of the learner and teaches students the strategies to be introspective. Motl goes further and suggests that an intrapersonal ability, metacognition can enable a student to examine the larger questions of the human condition. In order to be able to examine these questions, he goes on, it is necessary to have the introspective capabilities needed to gather evidence from individual existence, and adopt a set of values or principles to guide philosophical inquiry (2009).

This ability to be introspective not only means that a student can become more effective at planning, monitoring and evaluating to learn in an academic sense, but - as Deakin-Crick and Jelfs suggest - the development of these learning habits could also enable a student to open up to learning of a more spiritual nature which would include the ability to reflect on existential questions and engage in existential thinking (2011, pp202ff). All four of the 'Rs' can contribute to the development of existential thinking as I go on to show.

4.6.1 Resilience

Resilience embodies the 'affective' aspect of learning as it aims to enable students to manage their emotional responses to learning and includes the ideas of self-worth, personal meaning making, the ability to change or revise a view, and seeing links between what a student knows and what they learn. Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the fact that existential thinking can be intellectually and emotionally challenging (4.4), as it is asking the student to look beyond the subject content to the inherent values and issues. Students who are not good at existential

thinking cannot manage their emotional response to what they are learning, and some of the reasons for this could be caused by childhood trauma and mental health issues which can be difficult to resolve, but, for many students, they may never have been taught to manage emotional responses to their learning. Studying religious and worldview responses to existential issues questions can be frightening as they problematise a student's worldview which may never have been questioned before. The teaching of what it is to be an existential thinker is not without its difficulties, and should not be done consideration of the effect the subject matter could have on the individual. Time and effort should be spent on the creation of a suitable learning environment in which students are enabled to be confident, and to feel safe to express their views and learn from others. Through the development of perseverance, the BLP domain of resilience aims to help students manage their emotional response better, particularly when they come across existential ideas which are difficult or unfamiliar to them; through improved resilience they are able to manage their distractions, to focus more on the ideas which are being presented to them, and to take notice of their own attitudes to existential questions and those of others.

4.6.2 Resourcefulness

Resourcefulness includes learning habits which enable a student to engage in the academic learning of religions and worldviews, and the use of reason, thinking skills and other cognitive abilities are vital for this task. Existential thinking, when a student personally engages with the existential issues, not only requires the emotional capacities provided by developing resilience, but also demand the cognitive abilities featured in the resourcefulness domain. Key to existential thinking is the engagement in some level of personal introspection and, for this

to be successful, a student needs to be able to make links between their personal views and those of others: they need to be able to think through ideas, to ask questions of themselves, to make use of differing resources, to use their imaginations to reflect on new experiences, and to wonder at new ideas and explore new possibilities.

4.6.3 Reflectiveness

BLP is a metacognitive tool which can help a student to become more introspective, and the reflectiveness domain specifically addresses this. This domain involves the development of meta-learning, planning, distilling and revising, all of which contribute to the metacognitive and self-regulative nature of BLP. The reflective nature of this domain encourages students to develop a 'dialectical relationship' or 'existential struggle' between their views and those which they study, from which a student can distil and take with them what is useful and reject what is not. Through personal reflection, some students may revise or adopt new views as a product of their existential thinking.

4.6.4 Reciprocity

Reciprocity encompasses the social aspect of learning, and includes the ability to work independently and with others. The other learning habits developed in this domain are empathy, listening and imitation. Empathy is considered to be a feature of spiritual intelligence (Amram, 2007 and Noble, 2000), and Vaughan suggests that developing empathy is vital for developing an inner spiritual life (2002, p20). His view is echoed by Huber and MacDonald who write that the way in which people think about religious ideas could be associated with higher levels of (cognitive) empathy (2012, p207). Therefore, if thinking about religious concepts or developing an inner spiritual life is associated with empathy, it is also possible that - as a closely

related construct - empathy could also be linked to the ability to think well existentially. There is something of seemingly obvious here, as it is important for students to try and show some empathy when learning about the beliefs and experiences of others. The ability to be empathetic also implies a level of self-awareness in which a student can distinguish their personal feelings from those of others, and where they can try to regulate their emotional response to the beliefs and values of others. Existential thinking requires a level of respect from the student towards the views with which they are engaging, but this does not mean they cannot challenge them; however, in order for any existential learning to take place the student needs to listen actively to, and consider the views of, others.

4.7 Summary

This chapter explores the meaning of ‘personal development’. Grimmitt (1987) describes the ‘personal’, or ‘human’, development as the development of a ‘spiritual awareness’, which he defines as being a universal capacity with which all people are born. While I have sympathy for such a view, the idea of the spiritual comes with too many associations with religiosity, and it is often regarded too suspiciously by people to be genuinely useful in the classroom. Existential thinking, on the other hand, is related to spiritual awareness, but it does not share the same religious connotations, and can operate in varying frameworks from the secular to the religious. Religious institutions may not always encourage existential thinking, but all religions and worldviews ask and answer existential questions, relevant to those of other religions and those who have no religion. Existential thinking is fundamental to human life, even if it is not always acknowledged or understood. Educationally it is therefore important to help students to ask and answer such questions well for themselves. Grimmitt argues that a student can be

encouraged to engage in existential questions through the creation of a ‘dialectical relationship’ between religious beliefs and values, and those of the student. Buy-in to this process can, I believe, be helped by using the language of existential thinking rather than spirituality; however, the language is only part of the answer, as student buy-in is also affected by the processes of teaching and learning which explicitly develops metacognition and self-regulation. BLP is a teaching and learning tool which aims to develop metacognition and self-regulation, and I have shown that there is a relationship between BLP’s learning habits and the qualities and skills involved in good existential thinking.

Such a relationship forms the basis of my research focus: can the development of building learning power help improve existential thinking in RE?

CHAPTER 5:

RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I concluded that as a part of the teaching and learning process in RE, the development of the qualities and skills involved in good existential thinking could be related to the learning habits encouraged in BLP. In this chapter I set out the aims, research approach, design frame, methods and data analysis for this study which explores this relationship further. This chapter also explain the curriculum intervention, by outlining the principles of a BLP lesson, how the learning habits can be integrated into an RE lesson, and what development in the learning habits and existential thinking looks like.

5.2 Research Questions

As a teacher, I have long had an interest in developing pedagogical procedures in RE which enable personal development. The origins of my research originated in a training session on BLP when I began to reflect on the similarities between BLP and RE as personal development. This study explores how the development of the BLP Learning Habits could support this personal learning through the development of existential thinking; it addresses the following main question:

How does explicit teaching of learning habits support the

development of existential thinking in Religious Education?

And, the following three subsidiary questions:

- Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?
- Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?
- How does this exploratory study of the impact of learning habits on the students' development of existential thinking translate into recommendations for the pedagogy of RE today?

The main question could be explored in a number of ways, but I designed and implemented a scheme of work created specifically to develop both Learning Power and the personal development aim of Religious Education. This study is a small-scale qualitative exploratory study drawing upon some of the principles of teacher - or action - research in order to explore student development and engagement with both existential thinking and the learning habits.

5.3 Research Design

5.3.1 Research paradigms

In addressing my research question, there were several research approaches I could have drawn from, all of which make differing ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (how we know it), axiological (what values go into it), rhetorical (how we write about it) and methodological (processes for studying it) claims (Robson, 2011). The main positions, or paradigms (positions on the best ways to think about and study the social world), for thinking about research in the social world are outlined by Thomas as positivistic and interpretivist.

Positivism is much more scientific in nature - knowledge is gained objectively and 'observed, measured and studied scientifically' – as the researcher's views and values are absent from any part of the scientific process to remain neutral (2013, p107). In contrast, the interpretivist view argues that the social world about which we are trying to gain knowledge is not as straightforwardly observable as the positivistic view would suggest, as each of us interprets what we see, hear and experience in vastly different ways (*ibid*, p108). In this view, knowledge is socially constructed, and the researcher's views and values are part of the process which must be accounted for.

As part of this so-called interpretivist-positivistic divide, the terms 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' are often used. Qualitative research, simply speaking, refers to research which does not use numbers and is often associated with the interpretivistic approach, whereas quantitative research, which does use numbers, is often associated with the positivistic approach (*ibid*, p116). However, Thomas points out, that the way in which qualitative and quantitative research methods are often presented as polar-opposites can cause 'unnecessary and unwelcome oppositions between different kinds of research' (2013, p116). He argues that the two approaches can be complementary to each other and offer differing ways to research a subject.

When designing my curriculum intervention, I was aware of the philosophical debates outlined above, but I decided to take more of a pragmatic, mixed methods approach using predominantly qualitative methods but supplemented by some of a quantitative nature. As a

teacher and researcher, I wanted the flexibility of a mixed – methods approach so as not to be tied down to any one philosophical position and, as Creswell argues, to allow me to focus more on the 'what' and 'how' of research (2009, p10ff).

5.3.2 Small-scale exploratory study

To my knowledge this research is the first study of its kind to look directly at how the explicit teaching of the BLP learning habits could support the development of existential thinking in Religious Education, and it was therefore exploratory in nature (Swedberg, 2020, p18) as it aimed to look at how the curriculum intervention might affect differing students, whether specific learning habits had more of an effect on existential thinking than others, and what, if any, recommendation could be suggested for the pedagogy of RE and further research.

Although my curriculum intervention was not action research, it drew on some of its principles: firstly, the research was conducted as part of my classroom practice and was not an add on to what I was doing; secondly, as a teacher, I was keen to understand how students' learning could be influenced and, to reflect upon and improve my practice (Edwards and Talbot, 1994, p.52). Thirdly, as an exploratory study, I was not, initially intending to make any empirical claims about what I learnt, but to explore, improve and generate more questions. As Elliot puts it my main concern was 'to improve practice rather than produce knowledge' (1991, p49).

5.3.3 Positionality

An issue with the practical nature of this type of exploratory research, and its place within a teacher's professional practice, however, is the potential for 'personal over-involvement' where the personal biases of the researcher may affect the way in which any data generated is interpreted (Kock, McQueen and Scott, 1997). I therefore had to be honest with myself: I have long had an interest in the development of learning habits in the classroom and with the teaching of RE as personal development (combining the two is a relatively new departure) which means I did have a vested interest in my research being successful. To tackle this, as with any other researcher in my situation, my personal bias needed to be acknowledged and taken fully into account, especially when interpreting the data. Other issues could also have arisen from external pressures, such as those in more senior positions than me in school wanting to affect the outcomes of the research, or if I felt the need to please my seniors (Noffke and Somekh, 2009). Unlike the issues associated with personal bias I did not feel under any external pressure to produce any particular outcome nor did I feel the need to please anyone. In fact, as I am part of a Teaching School, we are actively encouraged to take part and initiate research. To this end we are given a lot of freedom to pursue out interests, as long as all safeguarding and data protection procedures are followed.

3.3.4 Generalisability

As outlined by Bell, *et al.* (2010) there are different ways of engaging with research in an educational context. My previous experiences of classroom research was very much researcher-led as I was one of several teachers who met with a university researcher, I delivered some research materials to a class provided by the researcher, and, although I was

party to analysing the data gathered, I did not report on the findings. In contrast, the research presented in this project is what Bell *et al.* would describe as practioner-led in that, with guidance from a supervisor, I was responsible for the planning, implementation, analysis and reporting.

Relating specifically to my third sub research question, the issue with such small-scale exploratory research projects is that they are not necessarily scientifically generalisable to other contexts due to the number of variables, both visible and invisible, that affect the events studied. Bassey argues that they are therefore of little use for educational policy making which needs to be able to say 'do x and y will occur' (1981, p73). However, in a change of heart, Bassey later argues that small scale teacher research can be useful, as he outlines his theory of 'fuzzy generalisation' which he defines as a generalisation 'that is neither likely to be true in every case, nor likely to be untrue in every case: it is something that may be true' (2001, p10). That is, the results of a pedagogical practice generated by educational research in one context may not straightforwardly be applied to another because of the differing variables involved (for example, the socio-economic background of the students, the receptiveness of the staff to new pedagogy and the culture of the school). However, he argues educational research is not undermined by these variables, and by using his 'fuzzy generalisation' it can be said that taking into account the background of the students, a particular pedagogical procedure *may* work (*ibid*, pp17ff). The idea of 'fuzzy generalisation' is useful to my research in response to those who criticise small scale research as not being scientifically generalisable, because they do not take into account that while teacher research may not initially be applicable to all settings, the insights gained by teachers in their own classrooms may be useful for others, or

at least provoke debate and reflection on teaching pedagogy and pedagogical procedures, which in turn may contribute to educational theory.

Concerns with the generalisation of research from one educational setting to another are highlighted by Larkin, *et al.* when they state that no research can account for all variables present in complex learning environments; however, 'that does not mean that we cannot learn things of value from research studies' (2020, p19). It is therefore important for small-scale, teacher-led research to be shared with other colleagues, schools and contexts, and that schools actively engage with and generate research. Indeed, as a Specialist Leader of Education, I am often asked to work with other colleagues in differing contexts on a number of issues, in many ways which reflect my research interests. It has been through my own engagement with educational research, both in the RE context and of education pedagogy generally, that I have both become a much more reflective practitioner, and - coupled with the confidence gained by twenty years in the profession – been able, as Elliott puts it (as part of his application of Peter's educational theory (1966, 1973) to educational research) to 'engage in educational research and not simply with it' (2001, p565). Hopkins also notes in his preface to the fifth edition of *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research* that despite a much more top-down approach to policy making in teaching, it is still the teachers themselves who have the most influence on student achievement, and if educators are serious about improving education in our schools, then teachers should be more involved in classroom research not less (2014, pxiii). He comments

> Teacher-researchers have to increasingly take a whole-school and at times even a systemic perspective. They now have to interpret and adapt policy to their own

> teaching situation, and link their classroom research work to that of other colleagues and whole-school priorities, as well as to the process of teaching and learning (*ibid).*

Similarly, my research project was not just about improving my own practice, as the development of learning habits are relevant whole-school, and for other schools. My research also contributes to an on-going debate in academic literature about the nature of RE as personal development, is it still relevant today, and how, through the explicit use of learning habits, this aim could be delivered more effectively.

5.4 Curriculum Intervention

The RE content to be taught the scheme of work comprised of four units of work taught over the academic year (although due to time, only the first three were taught in the end). I did not have control over what was taught during the intervention, as I was required to teach what was delivered to all Year 7 students across the school. These units of work were:

- Introduction to Religious Education
- Why do people believe in God?
- What makes us happy? An introduction to the life and teachings of Buddha
- Do we need to be saved? An introduction to the life and teachings of Jesus

Ideally, I would have liked to have chosen the lesson content of all units with personal development and existential thinking in mind; however, as the focus of the first unit was on religious literacy, it was more difficult without the links being forced, or treated as an added extra; this caused issues, as is commented in chapter 9. The units of work on the existence of God and happiness, however, were more suitable, as they were based on existential questions

and issues, and enabled the type of RE I was encouraging in which the students could create, as Grimmitt puts it, a 'dialectical relationship' between their worldview and that of the religions studied. Also, a type of RE which problematises accepted ways of seeing the world and which encourages self-reflection through the study of religious and non-religious attitude to existential issues.

This is not to say that this is a type of RE which does not value knowledge but that the value of knowledge, is how it contributes to a student's personal development. Many of the other aims for RE may be seen to put a higher value on cognitive abilities which may lead to students to achieve good religious literacy, but de Souza has stated that through an overemphasis on cognition, it is possible that 'children may achieve the complex cognitive skills desired so that they produce 'right' answers, but this does not guarantee that the learning has reached a depth level which has the power to be transformative' (2005, p45). The potential to be transformative is exactly what RE as personal development attempts to be, and in section 5.4.3, (figure 9), I outline the markers for development in existential thinking to show what this might look like.

Despite delivering the same content as other RE teachers to their groups, what made my curriculum intervention different was my more conscious emphasis on existential issues and personal development. The most important difference, however, was the explicit integration of the BLP learning habits into the RE curriculum.

5.4.1 Developing the Learning Habits

To answer my main research question (How does explicit teaching of learning habits support the development of existential thinking in Religious Education?) and the second subsidiary research question (Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?), I needed to have some sense in how the learning habits can be developed.

To facilitate a BLP lesson, Claxton *et al.* (2011) recommend that lessons should reflect what he terms as the 'Teacher's Palette' (figure 5) in which the learning habits are orchestrated, commented upon, modelled, and explained.[2] To ensure the success of the introduction of the learning habits, they were introduced - one or maybe two - at a time as part of the objectives for a lesson, and they would be returned to regularly. More specifically, the research lessons enabled the development of the learning habits in a number of ways:

1. as an 'ongoing reminder' the objectives for the lesson included at least one of the learning habits alongside the subject content to be taught/highlighted in the lesson
2. the chosen learning habits were to serve both the content to be taught or the teaching strategies employed
3. the success criteria generated for each habit was returned to frequently
4. unpacking the key terms and drawing attention to the learning habits throughout the lesson
5. encouraging students to see how the habits supported each other
6. explaining the 'purpose' behind an activity, beyond exploring the subject content
7. students to use a learning diary to rate and comments on their success and set themselves targets to improve
8. where the teacher comments upon the learning habits in an informal manner
9. developing a positive, 'can-do' attitude to learning in which the habits are seen as tools of improvement

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[2] Figure 6 is of a more recent version of the 'Teacher's Palette' but as this was only introduced very recently it did not form part of the curriculum intervention.

10. incorporating activities which are specifically orchestrated to help develop a learning habit, especially those which develop metacognition and self-regulation
11. including the learning habits as part of the feedback and target setting
12. encouraging strategies which support students to take more responsibility for their learning and develop resilience

5.4.1.1 I can/I cannot chart

To get a sense of progress, or development, in the learning habits, I looked at the work of TLO, and it was in a 2012 BLP training course with Steve Watson where it was first suggested that progress in the learning habits could be viewed in several ways: frequency of use, where it was used, and how well it is used. In my curriculum intervention, while the frequency of use was interesting, more important was how well a student used the learning habits. Inspired by this training course I designed a simple 'I can/I cannot' chart (figure 8) to help identify both what a habit looked like if it was performed well (I can) and badly (I cannot). It was not envisaged that development in the learning habits was as simple as the chart suggested, but that it could be used as the basis of a learning conversation with the students on how they can improve in a particular learning habit and that through the teaching and learning process, the habits would be commented upon and modelled to create a more nuanced trajectory for success in the habits for individual students.

Habits	I can and I cannot …
Managing Distractions	recognise and reduce disruptions in lessons
Listening	pay attention to what others say
Empathy	put oneself into someone else's shoes; understand someone else's perspective
Perseverance	keep going and not give up; manage own learning; tolerate failure
Noticing	pay attention to details
Questioning	ask relevant questions; show curiosity
Revising	change or rethink your views; monitor ideas and adapt
Working with others	work productively with others
Making links	see relationships between ideas and things; try to work out meaning
Metacognition	recognise personal strengths and weaknesses; understanding of oneself as a learner and thinker
Reasoning	think ideas through methodically
Planning	work things out in advance; use time affectively
Being resourceful	use different resources affectively
Imitation	see others as role models; picks up on values and ideas of others

FIG: 8 THE I CAN/ I CANNOT CHART

5.4.2 Integration of BLP learning habits

The principles of integrating the BLP learning habits (figure 3) were outlined at the beginning of this chapter, but with regard to the practical application, to integrate them into a lesson, firstly I considered which habits would fit the demands of the subject content, and balanced this with the needs of the students. Once a habit was introduced and explained to the students as part of the BLP method, it was returned to on a regular basis, was commented upon in lessons and modelled to help embed the students' understanding and use of the habit; habits were also used as part of the success criteria for other learning habits.

Not all of the BLP learning habits were officially introduced officially to the students, but they were included on the ‘I can/I cannot’ chart so the student used them, often as part of the success criteria for other learning habits. In practice, some of the habits became subsumed into others: absorption became part of managing distractions/listening; imitation part of noticing, and inter-dependence became part of working in teams. The habits of empathy and listening were separated, metacognition was used rather than meta-learning, and resourcefulness was used rather than capitalising. There was nothing wrong in making such changes for our school context and needs, as Claxton, the author of BLP, shows in his adaptions of the Learning Power Approach (2018, 2019).

There was no set order to introduce the habits as, for the most part, this depended on the content; however, as part of creating a positive learning climate, there were some - managing distractions, listening, perseverance and resourcefulness – which needed to be introduced at the beginning. Metacognition was also introduced relatively early when the students were set their first assessed piece of work.

In this section I outline the use of the Learning habit diaries and explain how the main learning habits (whether individually or paired) were introduced to the students alongside content in specific lessons (See appendix 12 for mid-term curriculum overview).

5.4.2.1 Learning Habit Diaries

When a learning habit was first introduced using the 'I can I cannot' chart to help, the students were required to create a success criteria designed to help them get better at that habit, and these were often created as a joint effort between the students and myself. At the end of the lesson the students then followed this up by reflecting on how well they had achieved the success criteria that lesson and set themselves targets to improve further. This process was repeated several times over the curriculum intervention, new habits were introduced gradually and older ones were returned to and recapped.

5.4.2.2 Managing distractions and listening

Listening and managing distractions were both introduced to the students at the beginning of the year as they were important parts of establishing a positive learning environment. For any meaningful engagement with any subject material, the general behaviour and focus of the class needs to be addressed, and revisited regularly over the year. As with all the learning habits, the students created success criteria for the habits based on classroom discussions on the importance of the habits, how they helped them learn, and use of the 'I can/I cannot' chart. These success criteria included not to distract others, to focus on your targets, avoid gossiping, respect your learning and not to talk. Games and other activities were used to emphasise the importance of the habits, which included a listening game, where students sit back to back and draw what the other student describes, a focus activity which involved students filling in a clock at certain times in the lesson with what they are thinking about. Listening activities were also employed in teaching the religious content of the lessons, in which students were required to explain to a partner what they had learnt about a particular

idea. Listening and managing distractions was also one of the habits, suggested by the students, for a lesson which involved a hot seating task: they gave themselves marks out of the ten after every round, based on how well everyone had focused and listened to the speakers. A similar idea was used in a later lesson, in which students were required to read aloud their speeches about the existence of God. The students were asked to state what they expected of the speakers (voice projection, confidence), and what they expected of the listeners (focus, not talking). In the unit of work which included exploring the nature of God in Hinduism, students also had to use their senses to explore the concept of puja, the success of which was linked back to their ability to listen, manage their distractions and notice details.

5.4.2.3 Perseverance and resourcefulness

Perseverance and resourcefulness were introduced at the beginning of the year, as they help to create a positive learning environment. Unlike some of the others these habits, they were introduced gradually through teacher talk and expectations. The students were given opportunities to write about these habits in their learning diaries and set success criteria and targets. Success criteria for perseverance included panicking, using your resources, thinking, asking your partner; for resourcefulness this included asking to help when needed, working with others plan ideas, doing assessment wrappers (where students think about how they revise or research as well as the content of the task).

From the very first lesson, the students were encouraged to develop a growth mindset, not to giving up, to make 'good' mistakes and not 'silly' ones. '3B4 ME'[3] was used as a way to encourage students to look at different options if they were stuck, and there was a resource station in the classroom (updated regularly depending on the topics being studied) to support this. Encouraging perseverance was particularly important in the lessons of a more abstract nature, such as the lessons on ultimate questions, the lesson on belief in God, and the difference between fact, faith, belief and opinion. Some students also needed to be encouraged to persevere with themselves, in how they felt about the content and their abilities in the subject.

Resourcefulness, was linked to the idea to the habit of perseverance. In the classroom, 3B4 ME was a key resourcefulness strategy, along with the use of assessment or activity wrappers (which is also a metacognitive tool) in which the student was required to complete tasks requiring them to approach it using a variety of resources; this is discussed in the review lesson, as well as the content learnt or researched. Resourcefulness was also key to group tasks in which the students would be expected to articulate what they expect of the group and what they expect of themselves at the outset.

[3] Three before me – book, brain, buddy, resource then teacher

5.4.2.4 Metacognition and planning

The learning habit of metacognition was introduced at the beginning of the curriculum intervention in relation to the importance of the students understanding themselves as learners. Metacognition involves the students monitoring their own learning and, based on this, the ability to change their learning behaviours or approaches as necessary. These ideas were returned to on a regular basis, commented upon in the lessons, and strategies were modelled to help the students in the learning process, encouraging them to know their own strengths and weaknesses and giving them the confidence to become resilient in their work (in the form of acknowledging that making mistakes was okay as this was part of the learning process). The main metacognitive tool given to the student was the learning diaries which aimed to help them monitor their own learning; metacognition was specifically talked about when the students filled in their learning diaries, completed any assessment work, or whenever they were asked to reflect in any way. As with all the learning habits, students were required to use the 'I can/I cannot' chart in order to set their own success criteria and personal targets to improve their metacognition. Their targets included being honest with yourself, listening to and acting on advice given to improve, not giving up and believing you can improve. As well as the use of a learning diary, many metacognitive thinking and planning tools were used as part of the lessons; the tools included the use of a metacognitive task in which the students were asked to speak aloud their thought processes, 'think, pair, share', and using thinking and planning tools such as CAF and OPV[4], and teacher modelling step-by-step processes.

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[4] CAF (consider all factors), OPV (other people's views) - The Edward de Bono Foundation, (2014)

The planning learning habit was often discussed in conjunction with metacognition, as planning required the students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. This habit was generally discussed when setting an assessment and also when the students were asked to complete a research task, either individually or in groups. When in groups the students would also be asked to consider how to work in a team well (see 5.4.2.10). For assessment tasks the student were given exam wrappers, where as well as learning the knowledge for the assessment they were asked to plan and comment on how well they revised, what techniques they used and what would they do differently next time.

5.4.2.5 Noticing

Noticing was introduced to the students in a series of lessons in the first unit on special places and sacred writings. To orchestrate discussion about the idea of noticing at the beginning of the lesson, I gave the students a spot the difference puzzle to complete, from which the class discussed the idea of noticing, what it meant and why it was important to notice things. Success criteria were created using the 'I can/I cannot' chart, students' learning diaries were filled in, and the success criteria suggested included keeping focused, managing distractions, and not giving up. As in other lessons, the success criteria and the lesson content formed part of the lesson's two mini plenaries. As a follow up to these discussions, the class was given several activities to complete which required them to notice: the first was a key hole games entitled 'Who worships in a place like this?', in which the students had to guess, through the use of pictorial clues, what place of worship belonged to what religion. Using a case studies

(Mosque, Church and Gurdwara), the class then looked at the idea of worship, its meaning, why people do it and what it might feel like.

Noticing was returned to in the next lesson on sacred writings, but this time the students were able to refer back to the success criteria and targets. To test their noticing skills, the students were asked to look at a selection of inspirational quotations from a range of films, famous people, music and poetry and identify which they liked the best and say why. This was linked into why sacred writings are important for religious people, and the ideas of authority, inspiration, truth and guidance were then discussed. As part of the lesson, students were challenged to notice when ideas about religious sacred writings were in any way similar to those looked at in the inspirational quotations. From their noticing, specific case studies (Bible, Qur'an and Guru Granth Sahib) were looked at, with the focus on the students noticing the details of a sacred writing which was tested in mini plenaries. Noticing was formally addressed again in a lesson early in the second term, in which the students were introduced to the omni-words for God. A game was orchestrated to practise noticing in a simple way: the students had to spot objects (from A-Z) in my classroom. The activity was translated into asking the students to notice details in the omni-words which would help them to remember their meaning (love spelt backwards in omniben**evol**ent, for example). The noticing habit was returned to in a number of lessons and was also developed using thinking and planning tools.

5.4.2.6 Empathy

The empathy learning habit was introduced to the students after they had completed a progress check (mini assessment) in the first term. Time was spent explaining what empathy meant, how it was different to sympathy, why it was important, and why it might be difficult. The class looked at different scenarios (mostly of a religious nature) in which people did, and did not, show empathy, and they discussed why the people behaved the ways they did. This led to a discussion on the study of RE, covering how it requires the students to look at differing perspectives, why in RE you need to be willing to walk in the shoes of others to understand, and why doing this does not mean you have to change your views or accept what others say is true. This resulted in a further discussion on the idea of 'truth', whether everyone can be right, whether it was okay to try and understand where others are coming from, while also being critical of the beliefs of others. From the discussion the students filled in their learning diaries and, using the 'I can/ I cannot' chart created success criteria which included listening, taking notice, imagining, making links, thinking carefully, and being open minded.

Empathy was formally returned to in the happiness unit of work. The students read the story of the Buddha, and they were asked to explain why Siddhartha (the Buddha) reacted the way he did to the four sights of old age, sickness, death and the sannyasin. Students were asked how Buddha must have felt, what role his upbringing had, and whether his reaction was understandable or not. They were then given some written work, and asked to answer the following question: 'Can we empathise why Buddha was unhappy after experiencing the four sights?'. The empathy learning habit was regularly returned to in this unit of work, and later

the class was asked the question: 'Has Buddha a point when he states that wanting causes craving?'.

5.4.2.7 Making Links

The making links learning habit could be interpreted in a number of ways: it was used academically to spot links between ideas in RE and to other subjects, but it was also used as part of personal reflection tasks in which students were encouraged to make personal links with the content taught. For example, in the lessons on the arguments for and against the existence of God and the views of Buddha on happiness, students were challenged not to be passive, and to engage with the ideas and give their views once way or another. Students also used it to mean 'what can I learn from what I am learning', and for other students they took it further and used it in relation to the revising learning habit, in which students changed or modified their views or opinions on a topic. Making links also came up frequently as part of the success criteria for others; students found it particularly important in the empathy habit to encourage engagement. When students set their success criteria for the making links habit the ideas included noticing, managing distractions, persevering, thinking and questioning.

5.4.2.8 Reasoning and questioning

For the lesson on ultimate questions in the first unit of work, the learning habits of questioning and reasoning were selected as the most appropriates to support the content. To orchestrate

the learning habit for this lesson the students were given a 'THUNK'[5] activity to complete at t he start of the lesson, the aim of which was to challenge them to think differently and more d eeply about a range of issues and ideas. The class discussed how reasoning and questioning linked to the THUNK activity, and they were asked to fill in their diaries and create success criteria using the 'I can/ I cannot' charts. The students came up with a range of success criteria to help them 'reason and question' better, and these included showing curiosity, considering different points of view, and listening and being resourceful. The lesson went on to look at the different types of questions which they could asked: it began with open and closed style questions, and went on to look at simple socratic-style questions. The students considered what made a question ultimate, and had go at designing their own, before looking at some responses to the questions discussed. The reasoning and questioning learning habits were returned to regularly, and specifically in the unit on the existence of God, when the students participated in a hot seating task in which they were asked various questions on their view about God. In other lessons these habits were also taught using thinking and learning tools (5.4.2.5). At all points, students were encouraged to revisit their learning diaries, look at targets and work on achieving these in the lessons.

5.4.2.9 Revising

The revising learning habit does not refer to revising as in learning something for a test, but is being prepared to change your views and revise your opinions. It is was another habit

[5] 'A THUNK is a beguiling question about everyday things that stops you in your tracks and helps you start to look at the world in a whole new light' - Gilbert. I. (2007)

addressed across the curriculum intervention, and was often mentioned alongside metacognition and empathy. Revising was used in an academic manner when learning any new material, but it was also applied more personally to the students when they were encouraged to be self-reflective, and to be prepared to think differently or more widely about what they were learning. The revising habit was often taught using thinking and planning tools.

5.4.2.10 Working in teams

Working in teams, or the collaboration learning habit, was talked about throughout the curriculum intervention, initially as the basis of good behaviour in the classroom with the whole class being a team. It was talked about in greater detail in tasks involving students working in small groups, when they were asked to consider what behaviours they expected of themselves and others. Success criteria involved listening to each other, managing distractions, and showing empathy. Other considerations for working in groups included being resourceful, organisation and planning, and - depending on the task - groups may have been given a thinking and problem solving tool to help like TASC.[6]

5.4.3 What are the markers for development in existential thinking?

In section 4.5 I explored what makes a good existential thinker, and I outlined that existential thinking

- *does not* require any development of any spiritual state;
- *can* operate in both religious and non-religious frameworks;

[6] TASC - Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC International)

- *does not* promote a particular view or attitude towards the world and the idea of existence;
- *is capable* of contributing to a student's developing self-awareness and their *ability to learn from* the views of others.

To answer my first subsidiary research question (Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?), I created the following list showing the many various student responses (or markers) to existential issues which I encountered in my professional observations of students, and from the insights of several writers who comment on student response to existential/ultimate questions in RE (including Allan and Shearer, 2012; Grimmitt, 1973, 1987; Hand, 2012a; Nobandegani *et al*, 2015; McCoog, 2010; Rumianowska, 2019 and Valk 2019). The markers were used as a tool show what development in existential thinking might look like, and how far the student are engaging or 'buying in' to such development. Responses from the students were shown in a variety of ways, but predominantly through verbal and/or written contributions in lessons.

Markers in development of existential thinking

1. showing an interest in the big questions of life
2. students can ask and answer questions of meaning
3. that students can make links between what they do, or do not believe, and the ideas which they have studied;
4. a willingness to see beyond 'knowledge' to the issues of value and meaning it conveys;
5. students can engage in critical debate;
6. that there is an emotional investment with the questions of meaning;
7. that students can engage with and are open to contested truth claims;
8. students allow the views of others to enrich their own
9. that students see any critical reflection on their own views, and those of others, as an opportunity to enrich their own;
10. students are open to some form of personal re-evaluation as a result of what they have studied.

FIG: 9 THE MARKERS FOR EXISTENTIAL THINKING

The markers for existential thinking are ranked loosely (1-10) to show a possible way of charting development in the existential thinking needed to answer my research question. Firstly, the markers are designed to build on each another. For example, to show 'a willingness to see beyond knowledge to the issues of value and meaning it conveys', a student first needs to be able to show an interest, and to be able to ask and answer questions on such issues. Secondly, development in existential thinking encompasses the notion of personal development, as seen in the way that the list begins with the basic markers and moves up to the more advanced. As the student moves up the list, more personal and emotional investment is required of them. For example, 'they can engage with and are open to contested truth claims' requires more thoughtful and personal involvement than merely showing an interest in existential questions.

I recognise that the markers for existential thinking is not an exhaustive list, the order is not fixed, and there are other permutations which could be included. However, for the purpose of this classroom intervention, this list of markers functions as a way to talk about any development in existential thinking.

As this is an exploratory study in a secular context, there are no expected responses from the students and all I can predict is that the students will react in different ways. However, as outlined in section 4.5, I believe there is a relationship between the learning habits and the students' ability to engage with existential questions, as they are both focused on the learner.

The learning habits may also support and encourage personal introspection and the ability to learn from others. I explored whether there are any differing reactions to this curriculum intervention, including how the students may respond to the attempts to develop their existential thinking, whether the learning habits play any role in this development, and to consider whether the teaching of learning habits could support the development of existential thinking in RE.

5.4.4 Research Class

The main part of my research design was the development, delivery and evaluation of a series of lessons delivered to a mixed ability Year 7 RE class of 31 students aged between 11-12 over one academic year (2016-17). In keeping with the school's socioeconomic demographic, the majority of students in the class were white British, and none of them were pupil premium meaning that most were from 'comfortable' middle class backgrounds. All Humanities subjects, of which RE is one, are taught as mixed ability groupings, but this class had a very high proportion (29/31) of student who, based on their KS2 data, were in the middle and lower attainment bands based on their KS2 data.

Before I requested permissions from the parents and students to take part in the study I approached the head teachers of the school to negotiate access to the class to carry out the curriculum intervention. As I was already the nominated teacher of the group, there was no issues with seeing the group regularly, but before granting permission to use the group for my study, the head teachers asked me a number of questions regarding safeguarding and

anonymity. They were not concerned about the quality of learning and teaching which the students were going to receive as I was an established professional; however, they wanted assurances that my plans for the interviews would not leave me open to any safeguarding concerns, and that all the participants would remain anonymous.

5.5 Research tools

A number of research methods were employed in this research project to enable what Denzin (1978) refers to as 'methodological triangulation', that is, research which uses a number of different methods to help validate the responses and interpretation of those responses (Thomas, 2013, pp145ff). Thomas argues that triangulation is basically corroborative evidence, and that the need for corroborating evidence is important in order to make any claims, no matter how tentative, about a topic of research (*ibid,* pp22ff). The methods I used were a whole class questionnaire given at the beginning and end of the research, and an interview with a smaller group of students selected from the class both at the beginning and end of the research. During the year, I kept field notes of each lesson and I also made use of some student assessed and reflection written work produced at various points throughout the year. As I summarise my use of each research tool, I also comment on their internal and external validity.

5.5.1 Questionnaire

I used a questionnaire both before and after the intervention to assess the any change in the quality of the students' existential thinking which included any changes in response, and the inclusion of the markers of existential thinking (figure 9). Denscombe points out that questionnaires are generally designed to collect facts and opinions but are not, on the whole,

a tool aimed at changing the views of others (2003, pp144ff). This tool was therefore ideal for my purposes, as I was not trying to change opinions but to capture views at a particular time. Using a questionnaire was also useful as it was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in a short period of time; a questionnaire was also an ideal way for me to collect data on a selection of existential questions.

Using an online questionnaire tool provided by Bristol Online Surveys (BOS), I distributed the questionnaire to the focus class by email at the beginning and end of the research. The aim of the questionnaire was initially to collect the class's first reactions to the existential questions asked in the questionnaire, while the one given at the end of the research was to see how students responded to the same set of questions. In terms of appearance, the use of an online questionnaire ensured both a professional appearance and ease of completion (2003, p152). Issues often associated with the use of questionnaires, such as a poor response rate, were not an issue as the students completed it as part of a normal lesson (*ibid*, pp160ff).

Following the advice of Denscombe the style of questionnaire consisted of a front page containing a short paragraph outlining its purpose, echoing the permission letters to both parents and students, reassuring the student and encouraging open, detailed responses, whilst not being too leading in the kind of responses given (*ibid,* p148). Instructions for completing the questionnaire were included throughout, as it could not be assumed that the students would be able to complete it without them (*ibid*, p150).

The questionnaire contained two sets of questions: the first few were demographic (asking for details such as gender, religious background) which did not ask for any more explanation. All the other questions asked for the students' views on a number of existential questions, and I used a descriptive rating scale which aimed to exhaust all possible responses. As the number of participants was relatively small, I also gave the students the opportunity to explain some of their responses further. The opportunities for explanation were used in an attempt to avoid any ambiguities in the differing interpretations of the rating scale such as 'Very important' or 'Important'.

To ensure internal validity, time was taken and advice sought over the type of questions to be asked in the second half of the questionnaire and to avoid any duplication (Denscombe, 2003, p152). I was careful to ask for one piece of information at a time so I did not confuse the students. As advocated by Thomas (2013), I ensured that I asked all the questions needed, as this could be difficult to rectify later. The responses sought to the questions were a mixture of closed questions with pre-coded answers, and open questions in which the wording of the response was left to the respondent (2013, p207). The mixture of questions allowed students who found it difficult to respond using the open questions to contribute too. My justification for the inclusion of specific themes was based on whether they were of an existential nature or not (see Panza and Gale, 2008; Wartenberg, 2008; Webber, 2020), and draws upon the types of questions used in previous research with children on existential questions (Pramling, and Johansson, 1995; Skei, 2018). As the themes were connected to human existence, I had a lot of choice but - in an effort to be both varied and reflect issues with which the students might be familiar, and would come across in their RE lessons - I chose questions associated with God,

the afterlife, the purpose of life, being good, personal worth, happiness, punishment, personal control and destiny. As well as asking questions about God and the life after death, I also included the specifically religious term 'sin' to see if it would resonate with any of the students. Due to the range of existential questions selected, there was some crossover with the RE curriculum lessons, but I did not intentionally base all the questions around what they were going to be taught in lesson, as I wanted to see if their ability to engage with existential questions could be improved in a more general sense. The questions selected were

1. Do you believe in God?
2. If there is a God, what is God like?
3. What do you think will happen to you when you die?
4. Does life have any meaning for you?
5. Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?
6. Do you think you are a good person?
7. How important is it to you to be happy?
8. Do you think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong)?
9. Do you think you are in control of your life?

The wording of the questions was also vital as they needed to be phrased in such a way that the students could understand what was being asked. To avoid any confusion, I called the existential question section 'The Big Questions' and in the introduction to the questionnaire I described these questions as questions often asked in RE. The wording of the questions was also important because the students needed to feel that the questions were asking for a personal response from them, and not what they thought someone else would say. In order to see any engagement with existential thinking, the questions were directed at the student using pronouns (you). It was also important that the questions reflected both religious and non-religious concerns, and that they could all be approached from a number of angles. For example, although the question 'Do you think God exists?', has a religious theme, it can be

answered in a number of ways - whereas a question such as 'Do you think worshipping God is important?' is a more overtly religious issue.

I trialled the questionnaire at the end of the previous academic term (July 2016) with another class of Year 7s to check that the questions and terminology could be understood, and that the time frame for answering the questions was appropriate. I found that the wording was understood by the majority of students, and the time frame more than allowed them to complete it which meant I was able to add a couple more questions. Unlike a postal questionnaire, however, I was able to deal with issues of understanding, as I was on hand to clarify any queries the students had about the questions and their wording. When doing this I was very aware I could influence their responses; as such, I kept my responses to a factual nature (for example, what words meant) and I avoided giving the students any suggestions as to how to answer the questions.

In an attempt to avoid 'prestige bias', I made it very clear that there were no 'right' answers to any of the questions asked, and that the students were to be as honest as possible, as no judgement would be made. This also reflects my classroom practice where I constantly reiterate these sentiments (Thomas, 2013, p208).

As the questionnaire asked the students some personal questions, Denscombe argues it is essential that a climate of trust and honestly is established between the researcher and the students. As such, having met the class for the first time in September, I did not get the class

to complete the questionnaire until just after the autumn half-term which allowed time for me to establish a positive rapport with the class (*ibid*, pp160ff).

I did not expect that the questionnaire would give a full picture of the issue being researched, but I envisaged that it would give an insight into the views of the students. How truthful the responses were cannot be ascertained, but using a selection of research methods means it is possible to get more of an accurate account of the students' views.

5.5.2 Group Interview

Group interviews were also used to support the questionnaire to see if the quality of existential thinking was also supported here. After the students had completed the questionnaire, I selected six to be interviewed jointly; the rationale for choosing the six students was to have a mixture of genders, abilities, backgrounds and the confidence shown in lessons to get involved. I was slightly hindered in my choice, as most of the students had agreed to the questionnaire but most were reticent to be interviewed. In the end, one student was unable to attend the interview due to other commitments; as I was only informed of this at the last minute, I was unable to replace her, so only five students were interviewed. While Lewis (1992) suggests that the optimum size of a focus group ought to be around six or seven, I found that five worked well.

The interview was chosen as a research method as a follow up to the questionnaire, to be able to ask for more in-depth comments about responses in the questionnaires. Asking for greater

detail was justified through an interview, as I needed to question the students more deeply about their responses to the existential questions. Through face-to-face interviews, I was also able to get some more nuanced responses and could ask for more clarification and detail, as responses to the questionnaire, although useful, do not necessarily allow for this (Denscombe, 2003, p164).

In terms of the style of interview carried out, I had three basic structures from which to choose: the structured, semi-structured and unstructured. The structured interview would have required a tight structure with a predetermined set of questions and a small range of responses with each member of the group being asked the same questions. Denscombe describes it as 'like a questionnaire which is administered face to face', and is much more suited to large scale surveys (*ibid*, p166). The semi-structured interview, as with the structured, also has a predetermined set of issues to be addressed and questions to be asked, but there is more of an open-ended feel to this style of interview, as the interviewer has more flexibility to change the order of the questions and to allow the interviewees to speak at length (*ibid,* p167). The unstructured interview is, as the title suggests, much more informal, and the interviewer's role is to ask a question or bring up an issue and let the interviewee develop their own train of thought with little interruption from the interviewer as possible (*ibid*). What is also interesting is that Denscombe describes semi-structured and unstructured interviews as existing on a continuum, and indicate that in any one interview both can exist. Essentially, as I was working with children, I decided the flexibility of a semi-structured interview would suit me best. However, in an attempt not to totally control what was going on, I made a conscious effort to step back and allow the students to talk amongst themselves which allowed them to

say what they wanted; due to the open-ended nature of the questions, it also allowed me to pursue unexpected and new lines of thought (*ibid*).

I chose to interview the students as a group, rather than one-on-one for a variety of reasons. The main reason was a safeguarding one, as I was told by my school not to be alone with any student. So whilst interviewing the students individually may have given me better data to work with, I was required to adhere to the school's safeguarding policy.

There were, however, advantages to having a group interview. I felt the interaction between the group members generated some interesting thoughts on the questions asked, and to facilitate this, I selected some points made by the group in their questionnaire and directed the question at that participant to elaborate further; the others in the group could then respond to the points made. Watts and Ebbutt (1987) highlight the advantages of group interviews, and their views reflect my own: they allow for discussions to develop and, where the students can challenge and respond to each other's ideas, this can lead to a richer and wider ranging set of responses. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also point out that group interviews are potentially less intimidating for children than individual ones. Denscombe warns that the issue with using a group interview is that some members of the group may feel that if their views were contradictory to the others in the group, they should stay quiet so as not to offend. The students who participated in the interview had not shown in lesson, to this point, any reluctance to express a contradictory or controversial view, so I do not believe that peer pressure was a significant factor; however, I am aware that, despite the openness of the group,

the students (whether consciously or unconsciously) may have modified their responses to the questions asked, as this is a natural human response to group situations (2003, p168). Thomas also highlights the issue of 'risky shift phenomenon' in group interviews, that is, as a group the responses of the group may be different than if I had interviewed them separately as they may, as a group, display riskier attitudes (2013, p203). Overall, I felt that despite the possible problems, the benefits of a group interview outweighed any potential drawbacks.

Before the interviews took place, I was very mindful of the warning Denscombe makes about falling into a false sense of security by not planning and preparing beforehand, and for treating the interview as a conversation, as this 'can create an illusion of simplicity' (2003, p164). I also planned how to interact with the students during the interview itself: I was careful not to ask leading questions, or to show approval or disapproval if students answered a question in the way I wanted or otherwise. I created an atmosphere in which the students were free to say what they wanted and to reassure them there were no right or wrong answers. During the interview I kept neutral, which is suggested by Denscombe as 'the order of the day' (2003, p171) and kept my participation to asking follow up questions and prompting them to explain their ideas more when needed.

I made an audio recording of the interview and started with an ice-breaker in the form of a silly game to get the group relaxed and ready to talk. I attempted to stick to the questions I had selected to ask from the questionnaire, but I found the order changed because of the way in which the students discussed the issues. I encouraged responses, and had to ask for only

one person to speak at times, as they were all very enthusiastic to convey their ideas. I also stopped the conversation at times to keep some control, particularly when it was obvious that the students did not have much else to say, when the responses had strayed too far aware from the original question, or when I wanted to move onto a different issue so as to ensure we covered a spread of responses from the questionnaire. As suggested by Denscombe, to help me analyse the interview later, I kept some brief notes on the atmosphere, non-verbal communication and the interaction between the students (2003, p181). The interviews were successful, as there was a healthy debate on a number of the issues, and all the participants were involved. One or two of the students did try to dominate the conversation, but I was able to temper this by directing questions at different members of the group when needed. Generally, the students all focused well in hour from the opening to the final question.

Rather than repeating the questions from the questionnaire, I looked through the responses made to the questions by the students interviewees and I formulated several different questions based on the responses made both by the interviewees and the class generally. One interview question was designed to address contradictions in their answers. These questions were then addressed to the respondent themselves for more clarification: for example, 'Student x – you say you believe in God because of your religion and family, but then go on to say you are not sure whether you believe in God – could you explain what you mean by this?'. Some questions were formulated to elicit more detail and explanation of an idea suggested, for example: 'Student y – you said that there is proof from the Bible that God is real? Could you explain this further?'. Other questions were designed to be answered by the whole group, such as 'Student y – you said that all people are equal. Do we all agree?', and 'What do we all

think it means to be a good person?'. I was also prepared to ask unscripted questions based on the responses of the students during the interview, as I wanted the freedom to follow other avenues if this would be helpful.

5.5.3 Field Notes

Using field notes as a research method is a way of capturing data over time: it can be kept by the researcher or by a participant and can involve recording the responses to activities or maintaining a record of thoughts, feelings, and conversations (Thomas, 2013, p200). I kept an account of every lesson with the research focus class, and recorded not only what occurred in the lessons, such the activities used, the response of the students, the discussions held, but also my interpretation of what occurred. Thomas notes that failing to make interpretations of the events is one of 'the most common weaknesses of the research diary' (2013, p202) and I did more than just record the happenings in a lesson by attempting to interpret what went on. Much of the research on the use of research diaries (Bord, 2001; Duke, 2012) is about the use of the diary as a record of the whole research process, but my aim was to keep a record only of the lessons; this process is often referred to as keeping field notes by some authors.

A problem with keeping field notes is that it can be quite time consuming, but I did not see this as a big problem, as I know from my professional practice that the potential data gleaned from the lessons themselves is invaluable, and the role of the diaries was as an *aide-mémoire*. Keeping field notes also helped me to reflect on the lessons, and it reminded me that I was very much part of the research, and needed to be aware of my influence on the students, my

interpretation of what was occurring and - perhaps most importantly - my positionality. I prioritised my own self-reflectiveness: what was I thinking, how was I influencing the research, what I was wanting to see, and what my biases and influences were.

5.5.4 Learning Diaries

An integral part of the curriculum intervention was the requirement for the students to fill in a learning diary to record their progress in the learning habits; it included an area to record the success criteria for a specific learning habit, a 10-point Likert scale for the students to judge how well they thought they had done in a particular learning habit (although the scale was abandoned when most of the students kept forgetting to fill it in, in favour of just a written explanation), a space to explain their mark, and a section for setting targets.

The use of diaries in research is, as Wilson and Fox (2013) and Denscombe (2003) argue, potentially a rich source of data which can empower the students and encourage self-reflection. Wilson and Fox add that

> Diaries also encourage the diarist to express opinions and reflect on activities that might otherwise be difficult for a researcher to expose (Wilson and Fox, 2013, p122)

However, as a form of self-reporting, the researcher needs to consider that what is written by the students could suffer from social desirability bias, where students write what they think the researcher or others want to hear. Also, students may not be able to recall what they have done in a lesson accurately (Veenman 2005). Denscombe writes that this issue can be

mitigated, if the data is not treated as objective fact, but as 'version of things as seen by the writer' (2003, p216) and it is used as one of several data sources. Another obvious, but important, issue raised by Hyers (2018) is that the successful use of a diary in research requires the entries to be relevant to the research questions under investigation. As I was asking young secondary aged students to fill in the diaries, I ensured the questions were clearly linked to the data I was hoping to collect, but I also left enough space for them to record their own thoughts. The students were already well-versed in the act of self-reporting through the use of self-assessment in all subjects, not just RE, therefore they understood the importance of being honest in what they wrote. To assist with the accurate completion of the learning diaries, the students were specifically directed when and how to enter their data (Taber, 2013 p122). The learning diaries were one of several pieces of data to be analysed as part of the curriculum intervention, and were cross-checked, where possible, with the interviews, questionnaires, field notes and students' written work.

5.6 Data Analysis

There is a wide range of methods which could be used to analyse data (Mason, 2017), but the most important consideration when it comes to analysis is that it is, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue, fit for purpose. The data generated by my study was predominantly of a qualitative nature, and this forms the basis of my analysis. I also have a small amount of quantitative data from the questionnaires, but this is only used for comparison purposes.

Robson (2002) suggests four approaches when working with qualitative data:

- Quasi-statistical
- Template
- Editing
- Immersion

These approaches are not, as Taber (2013) comments, strict typologies, but offer a useful guide to the ways qualitative data could be analysed. In my curriculum intervention I did, in a sense, work from a template, in that I was looking for developments in existential thinking and the learning habits. However, as I was seeking to improve my own practice through better student outcomes, my research was also exploratory. As such, I was open to whatever the data suggested.

My concern with the interpretation of data is not, as Denscombe (2003) argues, without issues, as no description of data is ever free from the researcher's beliefs, values and identity. Denscombe suggests a couple of ways to deal with this: on the one hand, a researcher needs to put aside their views and remain impartial and detached. On the other hand, it is best to acknowledge that your analysis is going to reflect the self of the researcher. My curriculum intervention lies somewhere between the two extremes, for even though I did make a concerted effort to remain objective in my analysis of the data it was only inevitable that I would look for evidence which backs my preferred position. I therefore tried, as part of the immersive process, to ensure that I did not ignore other possible interpretations of the data.

5.6.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is one way in which data of a qualitative nature can be organised and analysed. As Denscombe (2003) suggests, I gave the raw data reference codes, generated by the questionnaires, interviews, student work and field notes, so they could be located when needed. In the first instance, I looked at the data pertaining to the existential questions, and then the learning habits.

The questionnaires were the first raw data to be examined at and I initially wrote up the findings question- by – question, so I could get a better sense of the what the data was saying. The next step, as Denscombe advises, was to code the data into themes which would also have the added benefit, as Miles and Huberman (2019) write, to generate ideas which help analyse the next set of data. At first, I looked for any patterns and changes between individual responses to the questionnaires, and later I moved away from actual questions, and used more general themes such as 'God' and 'Life after death to organise the ideas. Most importantly I then compared the data to the markers for existential thinking (figure 9) to see if there was any development or change individuals but also in the class as a whole. In terms of the learning habits, as they were mentioned for the first time in the second questionnaire, I read the answers to the questions carefully and identified the emerging theme, such as which learning habits were mentioned more frequently, links to existential content and understanding.

The raw data for the interviews were initially recorded and, I spent time transcribing what was said which allowed me to immerse myself in the students' responses. Once I had this

transcription, I looked for ways in which to organise the data. As the interviews were semi-structured and the content wide-ranging it was important to identify the major themes using a coding system. I looked for the themes generated from the questionnaires, and then I noted anything else of interest. Once I had established several themes, I created a grid to compare, where possible, the responses of the students between the two interviews. Like the questionnaires the themes for the existential questions were very general, such as 'God and happiness', and at first I included everything I had heard; however, later in the analysis I reduced the number of themes to make the analysis clearer. The data was then compared to the markers of development in existential thinking. To organise the responses to the questions on the learning habits (which appeared in the second interview), I adapted the themes from the questionnaire. It was here that I noticed several comments pertaining to the role of empathy, and this duly became a theme.

Analysing the data which came from the students' work and the field notes, was a more complex task, because of the amount of data available. As with the interviews and questionnaires, I had to spend time reading and re-reading the students' books, diaries, assessment work and my field notes to identify possible trends. The process involved making notes and coding the data to show possible themes and links, which I then compared to the markers for development in existential thinking. As with the responses about the learning habits, I initially used the categories created for the questionnaires and interviews as the basis of my analysis, but I did not limit myself to them, and more were consequently created. For example, the issue of student reluctance to engage became more apparent in this data and this became a theme.

Across each data set I made notes on the patterns I saw and any areas of interest to look at later; I also noted any quotations or excerpts from students' work to support what I was seeing. Once I had looked at all the data individually, I used the range of themes identified and the markers for development in existential thinking to look across the data sets to identify trends, connections and patterns. It was from this that I decided to present my findings using a series of five case studies representation the various student responses to the intervention.

5.7 Research Ethics

5.7.1 Ethical Review

I submitted my research proposal to the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee in the summer of 2016 and it was given a 'favourable ethical opinion' in early autumn 2016 on the proviso I changed the questionnaire tool (see storage).

5.7.2 Consent

After getting the permission needed from the head teachers of my school to conduct my curriculum intervention, I wrote to the parents of the participating class members outlining the project and explaining what it would involve for the students (appendix one). They were asked to consent to their child completing the questionnaire and to be interviewed, if chosen. The students were also informed separately about the nature of the research, and were asked to give their consent to both the questionnaire and, if chosen, to be interviewed (appendix two). As the questionnaires were completed as part of a lesson, if consent was not forthcoming from either parent or student, an alternative task was available, but all parents consented to the questionnaires so this was not an issue. It was also made very clear, both verbally, and in

the letters, that the students did not have to participate if they did not want to. In terms of informed consent, Malone (2003) raises some interesting questions about its validity which I outline later (5.7.8).

5.7.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

As part of the process, the students were assured of confidentiality. Each student completing the questionnaire was given a number, and the identities of those questioned are known only to me. The interviewees were treated in exactly the same way, and the recordings made were only used to create a transcript; this transcript also used a numbering system, so that all responses remained confidential.

5.7.4 Storage, Access and Disposal of Data

Originally, I was going to use the online questionnaire tool provided Google docs, but concerns were raised about possible security risks with this platform as it did not fully satisfy the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Other platforms were suggested which did not have the same issues; in the end I used the BOS for which the University already had an institutional subscription.

Access to the data generated by this project is only accessible by me and, as per the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Research, it is being kept safe and accessible for a minimum of ten years. The questionnaire is being maintained (as far as possible) online in BOS,

but all responses were printed to ensure no data was lost. The recordings made of the interviews are preserved on a USB stick and kept safe with the printed questionnaires.

5.7.5 Student written work

As part of the research process, I also analysed some of the work produced by the students, and looked for ways they were developing their use and understanding of the learning habits, evidence for existential thinking, and any links between the two. The work used was kept confidential and all names were removed. The sort of written work I looked at was varied, and this was done on purposefully to allow a fuller view of the student to emerge. This work included the following

- the learning diaries kept by the students and three self-reviews
- assessed work on the existence of God and on the question 'Could Buddha's teachings make us happy?'
- several written tasks and activities in completed in their books including
- Special places
- 99 names of me
- How do religions try to answer ultimate questions?
- If I was a Hindu god
- A statement on their view of God
- When was Buddha happy and why?
- Reflection on the teachings of Buddha
- Dear Buddha problem page
- P4C task

There is a lot of research on the use of documents in educational research. Hopkins writes about the use of examination papers and 'pupil drawings' as a method of collecting students' views and experiences, but does not mention the use of actual written work (2008, pp122ff). Denscombe also dedicates a chapter on the use of documents as a source of research data which includes letters, memos and diaries, but mentions nothing specifically about students'

written work (2013, pp212ff, see also Wilson and Fox, 2013). Other publications on educational research, such as Cohen, Manion and Morrison, also list many ways to collect data such as interviews, tests, observation and accounts but nothing is specifically discussed on students' written work (2000, pp245ff).

Taber, however, does refer to 'Learner Productions', or work produced by students in the classroom and as homework, as sources of information about, for example, a student's work ethic, knowledge and understanding and development of skills. Using student work as data, Taber comments, 'should not be surprising, as teachers assess work to obtain evidence of learning and to guide teaching' (2013, p262) but that this method on its own has a limited role in research, as student work is only ever an indirect indication of learning and cannot therefore always be reliable. What a student writes and what they really mean can also differ, and the issues of a lack of literacy can inhibit a student from making what they really think clear. As with other forms of data, such as questionnaires and interviews, the students may also write what they think the researcher wants to hear, particularly if there is any sense of the work being assessed. Another issue lies in attempting to assess homework, as a researcher can never be absolutely certain who the author of this work is (Taber, 2013, p262). However, as part of a set of data collection methods to provide triangulation, student work can provide 'fuzzy' data which, compared and contrasted to other sources of information, can be used to build a picture of student response and learning which could inform research. As a teacher, the use of student work, particularly that of a written nature, is fundamental in the assessment of progress in any subject. On this basis I was thoroughly comfortable with using student work, but I acknowledge it would not be enough for my purposes on its own and needed to be used

alongside other data collection methods. As I read and assess students work all of the time, I am confident, that whilst keeping in mind the potential issues of using such data, it is a rich data source on the views, misunderstandings, feelings and perceptions of the students.

5.7.6 Benefits and/or significance

The students involved in my research benefitted as they were encouraged to develop learning habits which will enable them, if applied, to become more confident independent learners. It was also beneficial as they were able to develop their existential thinking and consider some of the topics we studied at a deeper level. My research generated examples of good practice in the development of learning habits in RE and was disseminated to other schools in the learning partnership. Other areas of benefit also stem from the explicit use of learning habits in the classroom and provided evidence for the role of BLP as a learning pedagogy and raised its credentials as a way to improve student learning and engagement in other subject areas.

My research is significant for the 'RE as personal development' model as it provides some pedagogical procedures for classroom practice and, perhaps more importantly, given some insight into what this model of RE is actually trying to achieve with the students involved.

5.7.7 Risks for the individual

The types of questions asked in the questionnaire and interviews posed a potential risk for some students and/or parents as the subject content, and emphasis on their own views, could have upset or caused anxiety. Some parents, out of concern for their child and/or because of

personal views/religious sensibilities, may also have felt that such questioning is inappropriate. To minimise these issues, I ensured all students and parents were fully informed about the nature of the research and the sorts of questions they might be asked through the letters. It was also clear that, if they wanted to withdraw their child from completing the questionnaire and/or participating in the interview, they could do so at any time. The students themselves were also given this option. If any upset occurred during the completion of the questionnaires and/or interviews, school policy would have been followed: in the first instance I would try and deal with it myself (and perhaps contact parents if necessary) but if the upset was deemed to be more serious, the school student support service was on hand to provide advice and support.

Other potential areas of risk were the responses made by the students themselves. The interviewees may have felt open to ridicule for expressing their own points of views. To minimise any risk here, it was made very clear to all interviewees that they should be able to express their views freely, but to do so with consideration for the sensibilities of others. To create the right atmosphere of mutual respect, I referred to article 14 of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child which says 'Children have the right to think and believe what they want, and to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights'.

Another potential issue accounted for were any reaction I may have had to a student saying or writing something with which I did not agree with? As an RE teacher this is a common

experience, as students always make comments which I do not always agree with, but I have never let this affect the way in which I treat them; only behaviour which was unkind, disrespectful or against school rules is an issue. With this in mind, in both the questionnaires and interviews, I openly encouraged the students to speak their minds; however, it was also made very clear that any views expressed should be done so without being unkind.

5.7.8 Other issues: Dual Roles and Quality of Teaching

An issue raised by this research project is the duality of my roles: that of teacher and researcher. This could be confusing for the students because as a teacher, I hold a position of authority, and I expect a certain level of engagement in my lessons, indeed, 'non-participation is not an option' is one of my classroom mantras. However, I was also the researcher and I had to seek permission for the students to participate. The question of whether by asking for permission through letter, the students truly felt they had the choice not to participate remains.

As discussed previously, Malone (2003) highlights some thought provoking issues on the idea of informed consent in qualitative research and particularly that where the researcher is researching in what she terms 'their own backyard'. Malone quotes Rossmann (1984) when she states that all research is coercive, especially when conducted in one's home setting. She argues that research of this nature cannot, by definition, have informed consent as it implies one knows from the outset what issues will arise. She continues 'the inductive, emergent nature of qualitative design precludes researchers being able to predict where the study will

take them' (2003, p800). For example, the researcher may tell the participants what the initial questions are, but as the research goes on these questions can change and new tangents followed (2003, p801).

I understand Malone's concerns regarding the issues of informed consent and agree that in terms of qualitative research it needs to be reconsidered. However, even though I acknowledge the issues she raises, the situation I am in is not the same as the one Malone outlines about herself. In the first instance, there was an extra layer of permission I had to seek, which Malone did not, and this was from the parents. If there had been any issue with the research I was carrying out it would have been unusual for parents at my school not to show their concern.

Also, unlike Malone, there are none of the same issues with authority, as I would have taught this class even if I had not done the research. Malone, on the other hand, was in a very ambiguous position, as she was conducting research with peers at an institution she also attended. She was also in the unenviable position of not being the only authority in the room as someone else (who was also her senior) was responsible for the class. A combination of factors led to some participants feeling uncomfortable with their research and their position in it.

Perhaps some students in my class did feel coerced to be involved because of my position as their teacher. Perhaps it would have been better to conduct my research in another institution

where I did not know the students and they did not know me. However, I hold that my position with the class and the research itself is more stable than the one which Malone describes. All of my class (students and their parents) consented to taking part in the questionnaire, but many of the students, even if parental permission had been given, opted out of the interviews. I appreciate that, perhaps, this may mean it was in their parents who coerced them into participating, but the fact that so many of the students did not consent to be interviewed shows that most were unafraid of drawing the line when they felt uncomfortable.

Another connected concern with my duality of roles is whether it makes me a better or a worse teacher. Are the students getting a worse deal than my other classes where I am not conducting research? On the one hand, the research class may have got more thought-out lessons than any others I teach; however, some of the things I learnt, I naturally implement with my other classes. While there is a sense that the research class, as my guinea pigs, risked not always getting the absolute best teaching and learning because of my additional research agenda, others benefitted from the research and professional learning process. I would argue that constant improvement is the nature of teaching, and that being a researcher makes me a better teacher as I am constantly trying to improve my practice through active engagement with up-to-date pedagogy as my research class demonstrates.

There have also been occasions when I have found myself being distracted by the needs of my research project rather than those of the students in front of me but, as I am aware this can occur, I took steps to minimise any potential harm this could cause.

This chapter has been dedicated to the research process, its rationale, tools and ethical considerations. The next chapter focuses on the findings of the study from the questionnaires, interviews and written output.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: Questionnaires

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the research design which set out the aims, research approach, design frame and methods for this study. I also discussed the ethical issues which I needed to address and gave a rationale for the scheme of work delivered to the research class.

In this chapter, to help answer my first two subsidiary research questions (Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?'), and (Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?'), I need to illustrate how far the data collected from the questionnaires suggest any development in the markers of existential thinking (figure 9), and how far the learning habits may or may not have supported this development. To do this, I am going to present the most relevant findings from Questionnaire One (appendix 3) which took place in the autumn term of 2016. I will compare these data to those of Questionnaire Two (appendix 4), which took place at the end of the research intervention (July 2017). See appendix 5 for a sample questionnaire response.

6.2 Questionnaires

6.2.1 About You

6.2.1.1 Do you identify with some of the following religions or worldviews (Q3)?

To gain a picture of the class, the students were asked a number of questions related to their religious or worldviews, whether religious or moral questions were discussed at home and their experiences and engagement with RE in school. As illustrated in figure 10, Questionnaire One shows that just under half the students claimed to identify with being atheist, with the rest with a religious or 'other' viewpoint; of those who claimed a religious view, the majority perspective is Christianity. In Questionnaire Two (figure 11), there is a change with those claiming to identify with atheism reducing from under just half the responses to just over a quarter. More students also claimed to identify with Christianity and 'Other', with an increase from around half to three-quarters of the responses. More familiarity with the terminology used, such as atheism, may account for some of these changes; however, of the seven students who changed from atheism to Christianity and Other, four also changed their response in Q7 (Do you believe in God?) from 'no' to 'unsure' and 'yes'.

In retrospect, it may have been prudent to ask the students for an explanation to accompany their responses to this question, but as this data is not available reasons for the changes can only be speculative. Allowing the students to choose more than one answer resulted in a small number giving more than one response. This was not helpful in terms of quantitative data, but it allowed the students to pick all the answers which they felt were relevant to them.

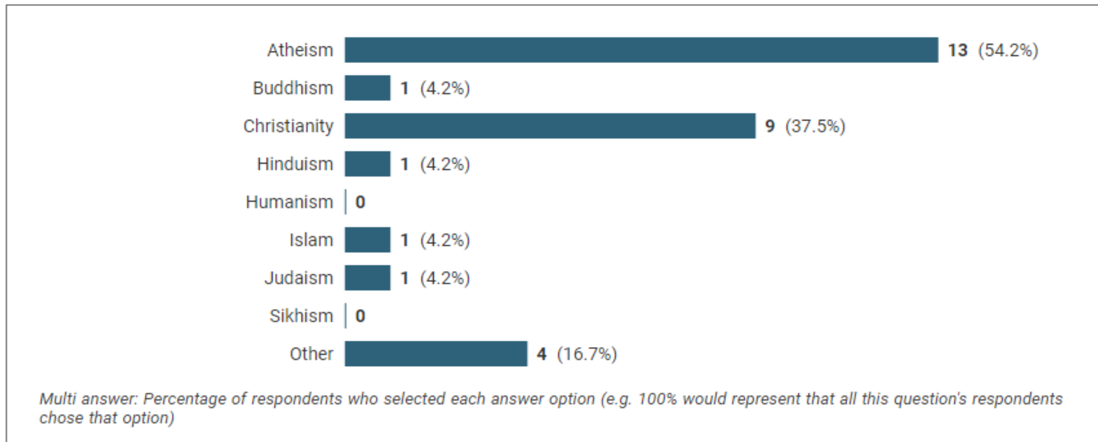

FIG: 10: QUESTION 3 FROM QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

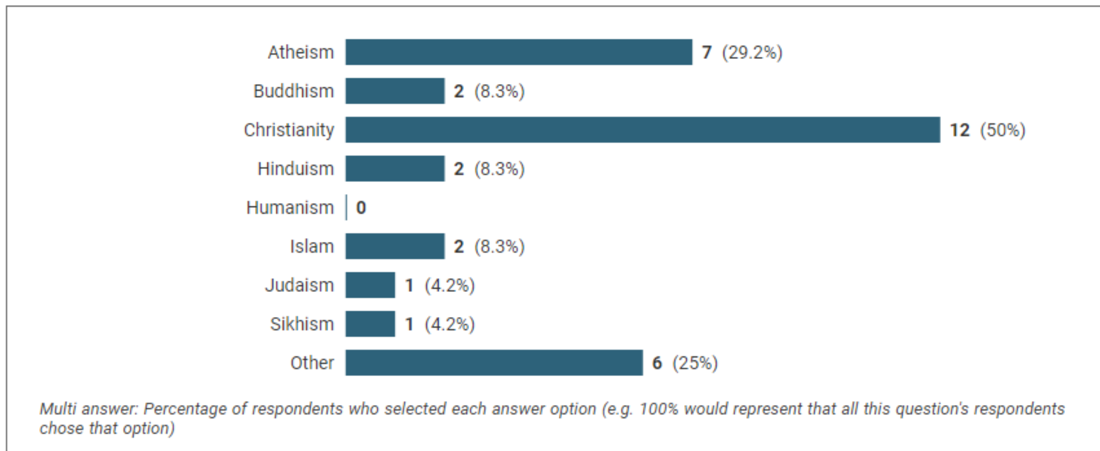

FIG: 11: QUESTION 3 FROM QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

6.2.1.2 Do you talk about religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home (Q4)?

Students were also asked whether they talked about religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home, the meaning of which and relationship to RE they should have been aware of as the terms had been explored in previous lessons. The quantitative data from Questionnaire One

(appendix 6) indicates that a significant proportion of the students (11/24) claimed to sometimes discuss religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home. There is a variety of responses as to why such issues are 'sometimes' discussed ranging from whole families going to church (Sonia), discussions about faith at home (Zain), the influence of other family members and students initiating discussions based on topics discussed in their Religious Education lessons themselves. Olla said, for example, 'I sometimes talk after RE lessons and sometime talk to my siblings about what will happen after death'.

More than half, however, gave a negative response to this question either saying 'No such discussions are encouraged' (4/24), or that such discussions never come up at home (9/24). For the majority of these negative responses, the reasons given for these views are that those at home are not religious (Zain) or they are not interested in God or religion (Jo). One respondent also remarked that despite both parents identifying as Christian, 'the subject never seems to come up for discussion' (Theo).

In Questionnaire Two, some students maintained a negative response to this question, and some who continued with a 'sometimes' response attributed discussions at home to a family member who has faith or interest in it (Owen); some attributed these discussions to what may be occurring in the media (Anna), personal interest (Zain), and to the content of a particular RE lesson (Jim).

In terms of the qualitative data for this question, there is some change in response from Questionnaire One to Two with more students indicating a 'no' and 'it never comes up' response to this question than in One. As with other questions, with nearly a year of RE lessons, the differences in Questionnaire Two may also be explained by the students being able to identify what sort of things are and are not being discussed at home more accurately. As these changes are incremental rather than dramatic, they may also indicate a different way in which the question can be interpreted rather than a change in view. For example, Olla indicated a 'sometimes' response to Q4 in the first questionnaire when she said 'I sometimes talk after RE lessons and sometimes talk to my siblings about what will happen after death'. This shifts to a 'No' response in Questionnaire Two when she stated, 'If I'm talking to my family as not all of them are religious' (Orla). Both responses could simultaneously be true and not indicate any change in view. What is discussed at home may also be affected by what is currently trending on social media, any current socio-political issues, changes in family circumstances, and the willingness and ability of family members to initiate and/or engage in such discussions.

6.2.1.3 How much RE did you do at primary school (Q5)?

The students were asked 'How much RE did you do at primary school?'. The data provided for this question was of a quantitative nature only (appendix 6), so no explanations of views were provided. In the first questionnaire, one student asserts to have done 'lots of RE' at primary school, although the majority claimed that 'very little RE' was done. The responses between the two questionnaires differ very little, and the overall perception is that the students did little RE at primary school. It is difficult to know, without asking the schools themselves, how

far the answers to this question is true. It is possible that it was studied but not labelled as RE, and this is why the students do not recognise it. Whatever the truth, the overall response to this question is negative, suggesting that many students have little or no knowledge of RE as a subject, and so probably had limited contact with existential issues and questions. As already highlighted, this may give some indication why there was a change in responses in Q3 between Questionnaire One and Two and that, for some students, this showed development in some of the markers for existential thinking in terms of showing interest in existential questions.

6.2.1.4 Have you enjoyed RE so far (Q6)?

The last background question the students were asked was about their enjoyment of RE so far (appendix 6). In Questionnaire One, the majority (19/24) of students gave a positive response ('okay' and 'Very much') to this question, with only a minority (5/24) claiming a negative view (including 'sometimes' and 'no'). In the qualitative data, the positive remarks ranged from simple answers - 'it's fun' (Seth) - to 'I have really enjoyed RE because I can imagine anything and there is no right or wrong answer' (Eva), and 'Because my teacher is mostly happy and it is very interesting to known about other people's religions belief' (Emma).

In Questionnaire Two, the generally positive attitude to RE changes little, but there was some movement in responses with fewer students indicating a 'sometimes' view, and more giving 'Very much' and 'It has been okay', or 'No, I have not enjoyed RE so far', view. There were also comments which reflected more of the work completed in Year 7: Anna commented 'I really like the partner discussions, and the group work as we can share our ideas and thoughts and

the ultimate question work!', and Olla wrote 'I enjoy learning about different religions how they might apply to us'. Two students (Anna and Alana) also mentioned the blue book work (their learning diaries), where they reflected on the learning habits promoted in that lesson.

In terms of the negative response to this question, it is clear in both questionnaires that some students did not enjoy RE, as they believed it to have little to do with them as they are not religious (Leo). For others it was a mixed response of enjoying it sometimes but not enjoying it on other occasions (Owen) and because they found it difficult (Laura). Some used the term 'boring' to describe RE (Imogen) which may have indicated a lack of interest in RE for some; for others it may have meant they find aspects of RE difficult to understand and, as the students had the freedom to answer the questions in any way they felt appropriate, saying RE was boring may have been a way for some students to rebel.

As with other questions, there were some incremental changes between the questionnaires with some students indicating they enjoy RE more and others less. What is interesting, however, is the increase in students commenting how they sometimes struggle in RE: Anna, comments 'sometimes I can't figure it all out as it is a little bit tricky'. Her response could indicate that more differentiation in lessons is needed; it could also show that some students struggled with the more philosophical and metaphysical content in a purely theoretical manner. For some, it may have showed they are also engaging personally with the existential issues covered, that is, the student reflected on their own beliefs and assumptions and did not always finding this easy.

6.2.2 Existential Thinking (Questionnaires)

The students were given the same existential questions to answer in both questionnaires. In the following section is a selection of differing responses to these questions, which show the extent of any development in the markers of existential thinking (see 5.4.3).

6.2.2.1 God

In both questionnaires, the students were asked two questions directly relating to the idea of God. The first was on whether they believed in the existence of God (Q7), and the second asked, 'If there was a God, what would that God be like?' (Q8).

There were some changes between Questionnaire One and Two in terms of quantitative data (appendix 6): in Questionnaire One, 6/24 claimed to 'believe in God', 7/24 that they are 'not sure if God exists', 8/24 claimed to 'not believe in God', and 2/24 had 'no opinion on this issue'. Of the students who claimed in Q3 to identify with Christianity or other religious views, their answers were either affirmative or agnostic, and those who claimed to be atheist, also corresponded to not believing in God or having an agnostic stance. In Questionnaire Two more students (10/24) took an agnostic 'not sure' stance, more indicated they believe in God (8/24), and fewer that they did not believe (4/24).

The qualitative data generated by the question on God's existence in the second questionnaire showed more of the students using religious terminology, such as references to the Trinity, Life after Death, Buddha's teachings on happiness, and terms such as 'agnostic' and 'polytheist'

(Stephen, Alana, Owen). There is evidence of some change in the quality and development of detail in the responses indicating development in the markers for existential thinking. An interesting change in view can be seen in Imogen's responses to the question of God's existence: in the first questionnaire she strongly denies God's existence:

I don't believe in god because it has never come up really in my childhood so I had no reason to be part of a religion because none of my family are but the reason why I don't believe in god is because I think stuff like this is impossible and the only possible thing that could of happened is the big bang in addition who created god and who created the person who created god etc. so gods theory doesn't make any sense
(Imogen, Questionnaire One)

However, in the second question her response is much more muted when she wrote, she 'had no opinion on the question' because 'my opinion varies a lot'. Another change in view was Alana who in the first questionnaire was also firmly against the existence of God:

I don't believe in god because I don't believe that he created the world/ universe/us. I believe in evolution (Alana, Questionnaire One)

In the second questionnaire she has both changed her view and now advocates polytheism:

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well I don't believe in one gods existence, but in many. I follow the Greek myths and legends, as I feel that we can learn from them and it interests me (Alana, Questionnaire Two)

This suggests that both Imogen and Alana engaged with the question of God's existence on a personal level, to the point where they both re-evaluate their response to the idea.

The second question about God (Q8) asked 'If there is a God, what is God like?'. As in other question*s,* the responses in the second questionnaire were similar to those of the second in which the students described God as a protector, carer, teacher and punisher. There were both implicit and explicit references to the problem of evil which also featured in the first questionnaire. In places there was more detail in the second questionnaire responses: in the first questionnaire, Eva's response to the question on the nature of God is short and to the point, but in the second questionnaire it was a more detailed and considered response:

'I think if god was real he would wise and be very helpful (Eva Questionnaire One).

If there was a god, god would be a teacher. I say this because he punishes you if you are bad and he forgives you when you make mistakes, because everyone is meant to make mistakes, and he helps protect you if they happen (Eva Questionnaire Two)

Martha also gave a brief answer in the first questionnaire writing that God would be generous, kind and want to help all people, good or bad. However, her answer in the second questionnaire, which covers some of the same ground, was more sophisticated in expression and detail:

I would imagine him to be tall and kind also very forgiving. He [God] would be a proud man who cares about everyone and loves everyone. He lets people discover life for themselves and choose who they want to be and see where it leads them (Martha Questionnaire Two)

6.2.2.2 Life after Death

The next topic the students were asked about is life after death: Q9 'What do you think will happen to you when you die? The responses across the two questionnaires are similar, but the level of detail is more developed for some students in the second questionnaire. On the whole, most of the views on death and those generated in Q3 on religion/worldview correlate: Sonia, for example, identified with something akin to a Christian worldview when she stated, 'When I die I hope for my spirit to go to heaven to live with God. In the Holy Land'. However, the correlation of views between Q3 and this question was not the case for all students, and there was some inconsistency. This may be explained by some students not fully understanding key terms such as 'atheist', but for others it could simply be an expression of idiosyncratic or heterodox beliefs. Owen, for example, said he identified with a Christian worldview, but then stated 'I think you come back a life as an animal because it can't only be humans' in Q8. Another similar response came from Anna who said she identifies with being an atheist, but later stated that 'God will take them to heaven and they will be with their family members who have gone before'.

An interesting change in response comes from Otis whose response to this question in Questionnaire One was quite terse, when he wrote 'nothing happens because you're dead and cannot move or think'. This atheistic view corresponded to the religion/background he identified with in Q3, however, in Questionnaire Two he changes his religion/background to 'Other' and gave a more in-depth response which showed a change in view and a more critical engagement with the ideas involved. Otis writes

I believe that when you die you watch over the world, as scientific studies show that people who have almost died can remember watching over themselves and can remember small details even though they were unconscious. Another thing that could happen is past lives, like Buddha believes in, although it does not explain how there are more of everything if there was always the same amount of souls (Otis, Questionnaire Two)

Alana's response to this question on death also changed: in Questionnaire Two she moves to an 'Other' response on the issues of what religious/worldview she identified with most, rather than atheist. Her changes are also reflected in her qualitative responses to the question: in the first questionnaire she stated

I think that our bodies will rot into the ground and from the soil will grow food/ crops and whatever eats that then I will be that cell that contains me! (Alana, Questionnaire One)

In the second questionnaire, her response covered some of the same ground as the first but is more detailed when she writes

When we die, our spirit is released into the earth, our body rots, fertilising the soil, and a plant grows from this. This plant's fruit contains your spirit and whatever comes to eat that fruit, gets your spirit transferred into it, so their child will be you. However, well you do in your current life will influence the next. There is no end (Alana, Questionnaire Two)

Alana's response in her second questionnaire is fuller and more spiritually aware as she refers to the notion of a permanent spirit or soul which is only hinted at in the first.

6.2.2.3 Punishment and sin

In Q11 the students were asked whether they think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong). The quantitative data shows there was not much change from Questionnaire One to Two (appendix 6); however, some changes in the level of detail and content of the responses are seen in Questionnaire Two. What was noticeable was a greater coherence in the individual qualitative responses with fewer being difficult to interpret. Some differences can also be seen in individual responses, which could indicate some development in the basic markers for existential thinking where the students show interest in existential issues: for example, in the first questionnaire Offa said ‘well I’m really not sure’, but in the second questionnaire it changed to the following

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I don't really know but I think that everybody deserves a second chance so after they have had that second chance they could probably go back to heaven (Offa, Questionnaire Two)

Some students, such as Alana, showed a development in response to the question on punishment. In the first questionnaire, her answer reflected a mundane interpretation of the question, which included how we can learn from mistakes, when she wrote

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yes because we have to learn from our mistakes and how bad the thing is how badly we shall be punished (Alana, Questionnaire One)

However, in the second questionnaire her response showed a broader understanding of the question, and evidence of a link back to the work completed on Buddhism, when she writes

I believe strongly in karma, and so if you do something bad, it will backfire, If you do something good, it will also backfire. So therefore I think that we will be punished for our sins (Alana, Questionnaire Two)

Some of the responses show little engagement with the question in either questionnaire. Chris wrote in the first questionnaire that he was unsure if people should be punished

because people say about hell and heaven and I'm not sure if I believe in them (Chris, Questionnaire One)

In the second he wrote

possibly because in some religions you do and others you don't (Chris, Questionnaire Two)

6.2.2.4 The meaning of life

In Q10 ('Does life have any meaning for you?') there is little quantitative change between questionnaire one and two (appendix 6), with no students indicating that they believed there to be no meaning of life in either questionnaire. The qualitative data collected from responses to this question offers some interesting ideas, and in some cases, a change in response which could indicate a development in the markers for existential thinking.

Some of the responses to both questionnaires focused around the idea of life having meaning due to family and friends (Seth, Theo), hobbies, interests, fun, holidays (Offa, Wyatt), and being able to live and leave a legacy (Jim, Offa). Other responses were more philosophical in nature:

Eva and Laura both wrote about happiness, and being happy as the meaning to life. Others stress the role we have as humans to look after the planet and be good people (Olla, Holly). For some students there was little engagement with this question in either questionnaire; Tim responded in the first questionnaire 'you can do things', and in the second 'living well and sometimes not', and some students did not answer it at all.

A change in response can be seen in the second questionnaire for some students whose answers became more philosophical in nature. The change may have indicated a broader understanding of the nature of existential questions and a development in their ability to try and answer them. For example, Imogen wrote in the first questionnaire that life has meaning to her because

Lots of people care for me and make me feel safe and nice so this is a reason I would not change anything (Imogen, Questionnaire One)

However, in the second questionnaire she wrote

You only live once and have no more chances to change

(Imogen, Questionnaire Two)

A difference can also be seen in Otis's response: in the first questionnaire he answered the question in a factual manner:

Without life no one would exist so no animals on earth no humans on earth (Otis, Questionnaire One)

In the second questionnaire, he responded more philosophically:

Life has a meaning but we need to search for it (Otis, Questionnaire Two)

The responses of some students to both questionnaires showed many of the markers of development in existential thinking. For example, Anna showed she understood what an existential question was, and an interest and ability in asking such questions. She is clear about what she believes in, and there was an obvious emotional engagement with the question asked. In the first questionnaire she wrote that life has meaning

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because you only get one and god has created this world for us and we need to appreciate it and never take life for granted (Anna, First Questionnaire)

In the second questionnaire she also wrote about the idea of life being a test, which may suggest an influence from classroom discussions. Anna writes

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I think the meaning for life is a test. I think we are used for experiments so the people above can experiment what to do and not to do in the real life (Anna, Questionnaire Two)

Other students, such as Sonia, also answered this question in a religious manner showing many of the markers of development in existential thinking. In the first questionnaire, Sonia writes

about life having meaning on earth, as it is an amazing place to live but that eventually she will go to heaven. In the second questionnaire she writes more about how not everything in life goes to plan, but this does not mean that life has no meaning. She continues, that meaning for her is connected to her duty to 'spread the word of God' (Sonia, Questionnaire Two).

Other students, such as Alana, show they have some understanding of what an existential question means but Alana was cautious in her answer in the first questionnaire she wrote life has meaning

> *because my thought might be wrong then we all only have one shot at life (Alana, Questionnaire One)*

However, in Questionnaire Two, although not very detailed, Alana's response reflected that she has thought about this question, it showed evidence of being enriched by what she has learnt in the classroom and also suggested a re-evaluation of her viewpoint from being only one life to something more eternal. She writes

> *it does [life has meaning] as it surrounds us and every living thing. However it can't be explained in one word or phrase. With life there is no end (Alana, Questionnaire Two)*

6.2.2.5 Uniqueness

There was very little quantitative change in the data in Q12 ('Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?') with the majority (18/24) of responses in the affirmative (appendix 6) in both questionnaires. Compared to the answers given in previous questions

across both questionnaires, there was a more limited range of response to this question which included having different talents, abilities and hobbies (Martha, Theo, Owen, Sonia, Leo) and looking physically different (Laura, Stephen).

Some of the responses changed little from between questionnaires, for example, Zain is 'unsure' in his response to this question, and wrote 'I don't know because I haven't discovered it yet', and in the second questionnaire he responds 'I haven't discovered anything special about me yet'. Some of the responses are short and lack detail: Imogen wrote in the first questionnaire: 'I really do not know because I may see myself differently than how others see me', and in the second 'everyone is unique in their own way as no one is the same on the inside'.

Martha and Sonia contribute interesting ideas to both questionnaires, but rather than showing any development in the answers, they do the opposite. Martha, in her first response wrote about talents and how, despite our uniqueness, we should treat others:

Everybody has something unique about them because of one thing, individuality. Everyone should be treated the same but everyone is different and have different talents and unique personalities (Martha, Questionnaire One)

However, her response in the second questionnaire covered some of the same ground but lacks detail, when she wrote

I think everyone is unique and everyone has a secret or obvious talent and when they put that effort in it really shows (Martha, Questionnaire Two)

Another example is Sonia who wrote in the first questionnaire

Every single person in the world is unique. Every person is different! We all have different abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Don't be a follower be a leader! (Sonia, Questionnaire One)

However, her response in the second questionnaire is less detailed:

I believe in God. And it makes me unique (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)

Any development in the markers of existential thinking, is also limited in the responses to this question: the students showed some interest in the question, and many respond using examples from their everyday lives. However, only some interpreted it as a 'question of meaning', beyond the mundane and physical, and where students did, their answers were often short and lacked detail.

6.2.2.6 Good Person

The quantitative data (appendix 6) shows there was limited change between the questionnaires with 'very important' being the majority response in both cases, with no respondent opting for 'not important'. There was a variety of responses to Q13 ('Is it important to you to be a good person?') ranging from it being important to get a job (Tim, Offa), to avoid

punishment (Offa, Sonia), for the afterlife (Sonia, Anna, Holly), to please God (Sonia, Anna, Alana), and because of a responsibility towards others (Eva, Stephen, Seth).

Many of the responses in the first questionnaire were very short and lacked detail. Leo wrote 'I feel been a good person will make me feel good', and Otis 'it is important to be nice to others'. For others, like Alana who tended to write more, there was no discernible difference in the quality of her answers for either questionnaire. She wrote

I think that it is good to be good because I do not want people to have pain, loss or suffering I just wish for peace and if people realise this then there will no longer be wars everyone will be happy. A good person wants the best for everyone (Alana, Questionnaire One)

I am unsure. I feel as if people are good for a reason (an example of this is to please God) and therefore you always do what you think is right. I think that everyone is good but in their own way (Alana, Questionnaire Two)

Sonia's answers to are also similar in the quality of her response. In the first questionnaire she wrote

It is very important to be a good person because, why make every other person's life miserable. God says to be that person that every other person looks up too (Sonia, Questionnaire One)

Because why be a bad person! God sent you here to be good not bad. And you will probably get punished for being bad (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)

The reason for a lack of response in this question is unclear, as it was discussed as part of a lesson on the Buddha.

6.2.2.7 Happiness

The students' quantitative responses to the questions on happiness are mostly positive across both questionnaires (appendix 6). The students answered Q14 ('Is being happy important to you?') in a variety of ways, including, so that others like you (Holly), so others can be happy (Zain, Jim, Martha), and the importance of a good attitude for life (Imogen).

The quality of the qualitative data for some students was more detailed and reflective in the second than the first. For example, in Questionnaire One, when asked if being happy is important, Orla writes 'because if your life is a misery what's the point in living'. In Questionnaire Two her response is much fuller and she included the effects on herself and on others, writing

> *because we don't know if this is our only life or our last day of life and you would not want that last day to be miserable or to die while you're still in an argument with a loved one (Orla, Questionnaire Two)*

For others, such as Chris, the answers in both questionnaires lacked detail, when he agrees that being happy is important. He simply wrote

> *because if your happy you could make someone else happy (Chris, Questionnaire One)*
>
> *Your life can't be always perfect (Chris, Questionnaire Two)*

Also, like Q14, some of the answers to this question seem to regress in detail from the first questionnaire to the second. Anna, wrote it is important to be happy because

if you are not all the world we be sad and a day would be very long without happiness and god didn't make this world so everyone could be grumpy
(Anna, Questionnaire One)

because, if we are all moody there is no point of being in life
(Anna, Questionnaire Two)

Overall, as with the last few questions in both questionnaires, the students did not respond as well to this question, which I found surprising as it was a core theme in the lessons on the Buddha.

6.2.2.8 Destiny

As with the previous question on happiness the students' quantitative responses to Q15 ('Do you think you are in control of your life?'), are mostly positive across both questionnaires (appendix 6). The question on destiny asked whether the students felt they were in control of their lives and, unlike Questionnaire One, there were many who argued that they are in control of their lives and that they can work hard to mould their own futures. Chris states 'if you work hard at school you will get a good job and be smart by you putting the effort in in school'. There was more of a feeling of personal responsibility in some of the responses which made it clear that if you made the wrong decisions you only had yourself to blame. Martha, wrote 'you're in control with how well you want to do, and if you do not make that decision yourself you are to blame so you're in control how you want to do!'. As with the first questionnaire, there were also some 'unsure' comments about the influence of others on your ability to be in control, and one student expressed a concern of being out of control at times and not quite understanding why (Emma). Other responses included how you cannot change the past, 'but

we can make decision that would change our life for the good or bad' (Martha). Beyond these, there are no responses which address the ideas of free-will, destiny or any factors which may affect our choices in life. The responses given, perhaps understandably, are more based on what the students experience than any abstract philosophical ideas, and even more exposure to such content may have encouraged the students to use more of this terminology.

6.2.3 Learning Habits (Questionnaires)

In Questionnaire Two, there were an additional four questions about the learning habits. In Q16 (figure 12) the students were asked to select the learning habits they believed they had developed during the year (they could choose more than one). I assumed it would be metacognition or perseverance as these were frequently referred to when the students filled in their learning diaries. However, the habits chosen by the students were noticing, closely followed by listening, and managing distractions.

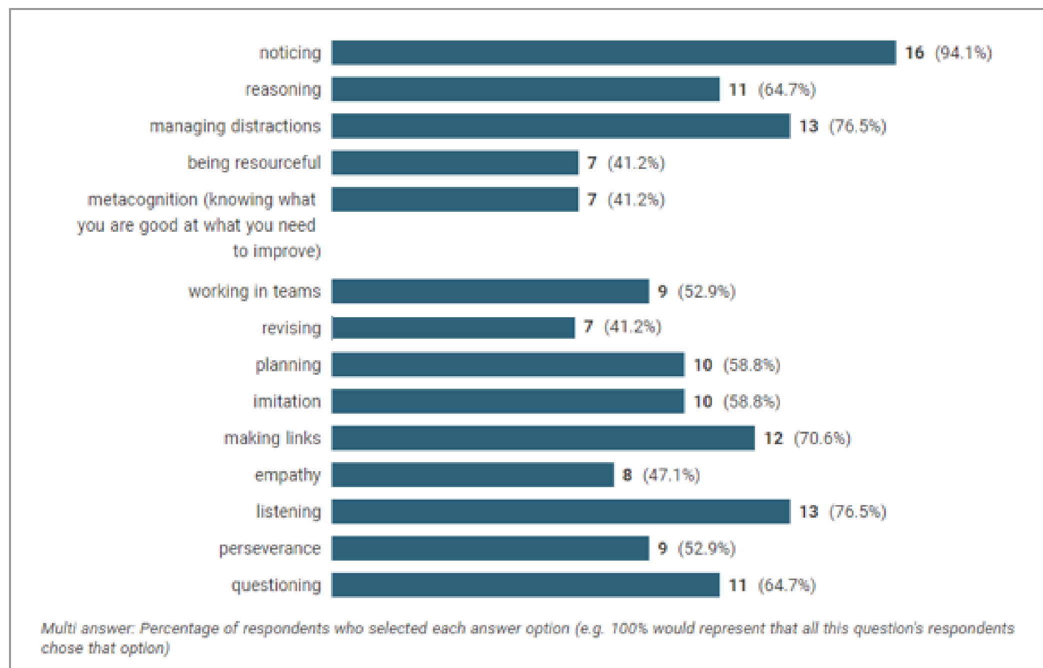

FIG 12: QUESTION 16 – WHICH LEARNING HABITS DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE DEVELOPED THE MOST THIS YEAR?

In Q17 the students were asked to explain the choices made in Q16. There was a variety of responses for this question: some students selected a number of different learning habits, and they generally acknowledged that developing learning habits helps you become more 'active learner' and to be more ready for lessons (Zain). Several make the point that the habits are linked and by developing one, you are developing others; for example, listening helps with managing distractions and *vice versa*: as Martha observes, 'they all link together so if you improve one that will make big differences with them all'. Others comment that developing learning habits is not just applicable for RE and it can help in other subjects too (Orla). An anonymous response also comments on the learning diary they filled in for the year noting that this helped them to develop the habits as they were able to refer back to their diaries.

Other habits commented on included metacognition and perseverance, and Sonia comments that they are the learning habits that have particularly helped them. Sonia observed that these habits were not taught at Primary school, and that is why they found school hard. They remark 'after spending almost a year working on them, I think I've got the hang of it and I'm going to use it for the rest of my life'. Perseverance is also mentioned as a key learning habit, and Owen notes 'I have been getting a lot more involved throughout the year and have been persevering a lot more with tests and work'. The benefits of managing distractions and listening were also commented on by Laura who stated 'I only used to care about what was going on around me but now I have learnt it is more beneficial if I listen to the things that are needed'. Working in teams was also highlighted as a key learning habit that had been developed by some students, for example, Tim commented, 'I know what to do if I'm in a team'.

In Q18 the students were asked whether exploring the different learning habits in RE had helped them to become better RE students'. The data for this question (figure 13) shows that most of the students agreed, with 5/23 'strongly agree' and 16/23 'agree' and only a minority disagreeing (2/23).

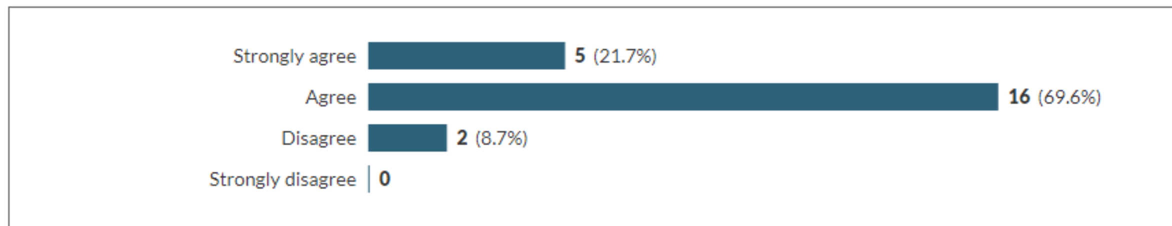

FIG 13: QUESTION 18 - HOW FAR WOULD YOU AGREE THAT EXPLORING THE DIFFERENT LEARNING HABITS IN RE HAS HELPED YOU TO BECOME A BETTER RE STUDENT?

Q19 asked the students for an explanation to their answer to Q18. Of those who 'agree' or 'strongly agree', some comment on how exploring the learning habits has helped them develop more generally as a learner: Mav states that learning how to manage distractions in particular has helped her to learn new things. Sonia comments on the development of perseverance and noticing when stating

> *if I didn't persevere I wouldn't learn anything, if I didn't notice I still wouldn't learn anything and that is what school is about, to learn and achieve (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)*

Others, such as Orla, also focus on how exploring the learning habits also benefits learning in other subjects. The students also comment on the benefits of exploring the learning habits particularly for RE, and it is through some of the comments here that there is evidence for some form of relationship between learning habits and the potential to develop existential

thought. Wyatt remarks that 'now I can see the religious side of things', and Martha comments that exploring these habits has helped her to think, become more motivated and confident in RE. She writes that the learning habits have

> *made me more confident when sharing ideas as well as more focused when completing tasks and getting through all these topics and realised how much RE can link together and make a lot more sense and more thinking is involved (Martha, Questionnaire Two)*

Other comments included how the learning habits had helped the students to empathise more and express their opinions. Eva writes 'I think it has helped me because it has shown me different perspectives'. Stephen comments that 'they have improved the way I work as I have become more inquisitive'. Laura also comments on the role of empathy stating

> *you can kind of feel what others are feeling so when you are speaking about religion you can feel what people are feeling (Laura, Questionnaire Two)*

Maria also writes that learning about, and using, the learning habits has helped her to become a better learner in RE, writing

> *the different learning habits have helped me become a better R.E learner. The reason I think that is the learning habits such as empathy, it has made me better as I can now put myself in other people's shoes (Maria, Questionnaire Two)*

Offa interpreted this question in a slightly different way, remarking that 'learning different habits makes you a better person', but Offa does not explain how they make you a better person.

6.3 Concluding reflection

Overall, in some of the questions there are changes in responses between the two questionnaires both of a quantitative and qualitative nature which could indicate some development in the markers of existential thinking. In terms of quantitative data, Q3 (Do you identify with some of the following religions or worldviews) and Q7 (Do you believe in God?) are cases in point: the changes in response to these questions on religion and worldviews and belief in God (appendix 6) have numerous possible explanations one of which is that some form of reflection and re-evaluation of views have taken place. In retrospect it would have been good to ask for some explanation of the answers in Q3, as it may help to understand better why these changes occurred.

Even where the quantitative data changes little from one questionnaire to another, the qualitative responses are often more detailed and/or more reflective in their content showing more engagement with the existential questions, and a willingness for personal views to be enriched by what they have learnt. This can be seen particularly in Q9 ('What do you think will happen to you when you die?').

Q12 ('Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?') and Q13 ('Is it important to you to be a good person?') generated the least interest from the students. The ideas of being unique or special could be explained by the fact they were not covered in any depth in curriculum intervention lessons and from a general sense I got from the group, as observed in the lessons, the students found these sort of question difficult to answer and for some embarrassing. The idea of being a good person was discussed at length in the unit of work on the Buddha and so it is unclear why this question did not generate more detailed responses in Questionnaire Two.

In terms of the learning habits there are references to their development in Q6 connected to their enjoyment of the subject. These comments on their own do not show any connection between the learning habits and existential thinking, however, in Q19 there are some specific comments which do hint at a link between the learning habits and existential thinking. As this exploratory study, it cannot be claimed that there is definite causal link between the two, but the fact they are mentioned at all does indicate the possibility of some form of connection.

CHAPTER 7

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: Interviews

7.1 Introduction

Next is a discussion of data taken from the two interviews which were carried out at the beginning (28/11/16) and end (05/07/17) of the research intervention with five students from the research class. The students were not chosen specifically, but were those from the class who had volunteered to be interviewed and who had parental consent.

The majority of questions were based on the students' responses to the questionnaires, which were completed prior to the interviews. However, as a semi-structured interview, freedom was given to ask other questions relating to the topics discussed as relevant. Consequently, not all topics included in the questionnaires were discussed, and where they are they are not necessarily done so at length. What follows is a summary of the students' engagement, and evidence of development in the markers for existential thinking (figure 9) and with the learning habits.

7.2 Existential Thinking (Interviews)

7.2.1 God

From the very beginning, most of the students in the interview group responded to the existential questions enthusiastically, and in both interviews the idea of God provoked a lot of comment.

In the first interview, Ada dominated the conversation about God and even at this stage of the year, her contributions to discussions demonstrated many of the basic and some advanced markers of existential thinking: she was able to engage in critical debate and her personal and emotional engagement in the existential questions, particularly those on God, were obvious. Despite the confidence shown in the first questionnaire, Ada had an ambivalent attitude to her faith, but she was also willing to engage with contested truth claims (those of her faith background and those from a more cynical society at large) which is another of the higher markers for existential thinking. In second interview, Ada's responses were similarly insightful, but she comes across as more self-assured and confident with her relationship with her religious and cultural background (see case study, 9.3).

Some of the other students also show in the first interview that they were wrestling with their religious upbringing and their own developing views. For example, Owen - like Ada - shows some development in the markers for existential thinking: he was engaged with the existential questions, and there was some emotional engagement with them. In the first interview Owen's religious upbringing is obvious, but he is also ambivalent towards his faith. This is shown when he said

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I used to believe in God, but I am not sure anymore because when I was little my mum used to tell me everything and I used to believe her a lot. I still believe in him but not as much for some strange reason. It's like Santa. (Owen, Interview One)

Owen also questioned God's existence on the basis of the idea of evil and suffering. He said

If God's real then why do bad things happen? (Owen, Interview One)

Despite his uncertainty, he also made several comments reflecting his religious upbringing. In response to a question on the cause of the universe, he said

I just don't believe in it all… you wouldn't just get a bang and it makes the world (Owen, Interview One)

When asked to clarify who, or what, is the cause of creation Owen said

'God… the seven days thing…'. Also, 'you say science knows about the big bang theory but how do some of us know about that because they weren't there… the scientists (Owen, Interview One)

What is interesting is that in the first questionnaire Owen wrote that he identifies with Christianity, but in the second questionnaire he wrote that he identifies with both Christianity and atheism. This demonstrated some change in view, and perhaps he felt more confident in questionnaire two to add in atheism to his response. However, the way he talked about his beliefs in the second interview was not dissimilar to the first: he linked a belief in God to a belief in Santa in both interviews and, despite his addition of atheism in the second questionnaire, in a discussion on belief in the second interview he commented

I don't believe in science... I believe the Bible (Owen, Questionnaire Two)

In terms of any growth in Owen's markers of existential thinking, it is difficult to comment on whether he has made any in his responses in the interviews on the issue of God: his engagement and emotional investment were apparent from the beginning, and perhaps through his interaction - especially with Ada - in the second questionnaire some signs that he is beginning to allow his viewpoints to be enriched by those of others can be seen. In response to a question on what felt he may have learnt from RE that year, he stated

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I think it has just changed what we thought about religions really, as I said I was not bothered but then, there is more stuff to it, to religion
(Owen, Interview Two)

Most of the group do not need prompting to respond to any questions, particularly those about God; however, Seth needed to be directly asked about his views. This can be seen when in response to being asked what he thinks about going to Church, he said

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I think for people who are religious it means a lot to them, but you are not entirely sure if you believe in God or not then it might not mean as much to you than those who do believe in God (Seth, Interview One)

Seth's remark about not being sure about God ties up with his questionnaire responses, when he identifies with Christianity, but is unsure whether God exists or not. Like Owen, it is difficult to comment on whether there were any development in the markers for existential thinking on the issue of God, but he seems more confident in the second interview to say what he thinks, which suggests that he was more willing to make links to what he did, and did not, believe in. In relation to a discussion on having a religious upbringing, he commented

I think that everybody should have their own opinion and no one should doubt it because it is theirs (Seth, Interview Two)

On the issue of the nature and existence of God, both Laura and James indicated in their questionnaires that they were atheists, and from the beginning they both showed engagement with the existential issues discussed and a willingness to make links to what they do, and do not, believe in.

In the first interview, James was open about his beliefs on God and was not afraid to bring up ideas which could contradict them. For example

Right, I don't believe in God but then it's kinda weird because something happen that kinda seem like a miracle, like some think somewhere has made that happen (James, Interview One)

However, in the second interview he does not contribute to the discussion on the existence of God, and so no discernible development in the markers for existential thinking can be seen in this topic. Despite this, one interesting point he made was in response to Owen's comment about God being like Santa, when he said

If you don't believe in God and stuff then you might not get good luck (James, Interview Two)

This comparison of God to Santa emphasised James's continuing atheistic viewpoint, but also showed a potential lack of understanding of what it means to believe in God, to a believer.

In her first questionnaire Laura wrote the statement that 'God is fake', and she was asked in the first interview to explain why she felt the big bang was more believable than God

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Because it is something that's more believable to me... is because God was made but who made God and who made the person who made God etc. But one person can't make the world, even if he is like a spirit or something... that can't happen in my opinion because the big bang's made from science because science is more believable because you have more proof. But since God isn't... you don't have any proof except from the bible or something for God to be real it's not believable to me
(Laura, Interview One)

Her response initiated a discussion with the rest of the group over the idea of whether God needed to be created, and the whether science disproves God. Laura does not make any more comments, but listened intently to the contributions from the others in the group. From Laura's contributions to discussions on life after death in interview two, it is clear she is still atheistic in her views.

7.2.2 Life after death

The topic of life after death was very popular with the group and in both interviews one of the questions discussed was whether belief in heaven or hell made sense without the existence of God. Laura's contribution to this discussion was quite extensive in the first interview, showing many of the basic markers of development in existential thinking: she demonstrated an

interest in existential questions, that she could ask and answer questions of meaning, and was willing to make links to what she believes and does not believe, in. She stated

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I think heaven is gonna be when you die or it'll be what your heaven is and what your place that you want to live with for the rest of your life there and so on and so forth… but I think the main reason hell was made is because you will die with all those regrets because people say if you have done something bad that's why you go to hell so people think. So I think that hell was made because people die with regrets that they don't really want (Laura, Interview One)

In both questionnaires, which were completed prior to the interviews, Laura identifies with being an atheist, but her responses shows this does not preclude her from using terms such as 'heaven' and 'hell'. She is asked whether heaven is an actually place, she responded that for her death was the end, but

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me and my dad go to graveyards.. its sounds weird but me and my dad go to graveyards sometimes and we just think like how did this person die or something like that. But why did they die? Did they die with regrets? I just think heaven and hell not a real place but it is for your emotions and feelings (Laura, Interview One)

She also added that after death she believed there was something of you left in the world explaining

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Yes, there is something of your left in the world, or you made a change, or whatever you have done in the world you have done something to affect something. So when you die you don't want it to be a bad thing that you have affected, you want it to be generally a good thing (Laura, Interview One)

In the second interview she returned to these ideas about hell and heaven, but did so in a more coherent and reasoned manner, and she was much clearer about what she wants to say. There was something of an emotional connection to what she was saying in the first interview which is even more pronounced in the second. She argued

> *I have been brought up to believe in a kind of heaven and hell by my dad. He believes in spirits and the afterlife and but isn't religious. It's like the day of the dead but with no God, if you know what I mean? So you go to your heaven or your hell… so you can go to a place that you would really like to be… with people you would really like to be in heaven with or hell is the place you go to do that, a place that you don't like. So, I don't know, ever since I've been little I've believed that but I've never believed in gods or anything like that (Laura, Interview Two)*

The perceived issue between belief in heaven and hell, and a lack of belief in God, are discussed further in interview one, where Ada explained that belief in heaven and God go hand-in-hand stating

> *I think God and heaven go together but then I don't think that you can't like you can believe in one but you can't believe in another because they both kinda lead to the same way (Ada, Interview One)*

In the second interview this debate is resurrected, and Owen stated that in his view that you cannot believe in heaven and hell without God, asking 'who puts you in the heaven or hell because if there is no God it's not like a random man put him in heaven or hell'. His comment demonstrates his ability to engage in a critical debate, despite being quite ambivalent about what he believes. This is also shown in other comments he made about life after death later

in interview two, when he stated that 'you only live once' but also acknowledged that he entertained the idea that 'we could have been someone else'.

In interview two, the class took the discussion further than just speculating about ideas of life after death, to discussions on truth and whether everything can be correct at the same time. The group debated whether all beliefs are true about life after death, to which Ada responded that truth can be a matter of opinion, so no one has the right to say you can or cannot believe in something, stated

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It is an ultimate question because, no one knows what, well what you believe if you think that is true and that is your opinion, so no one actually knows what is actually true it's just their opinion of what is true (Ada, Interview Two)

Ada's comment is interesting as it was unclear whether she was trying to shut the debate down, or - in her own way - was acknowledging that not everyone believes the same, and this was okay.

Seth contributes little to the discussion on life after death; however, he did interject after the comment made by Ada, saying

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You could like, it doesn't matter what you believe... you can believe in anything if you want. It's like believing in different things from different religions (Seth, Interview One)

Seth says no more, but James also contribute to the discussions on life after death, although not as extensively as Laura. In the first interview, James speculated about afterlife as a form of reincarnation, when he stated

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I had this weird dream where when something passed away you forget about your complete past life but come back, start new life, new family... like have a new mum, a new dad but then that would be like first time for everything. You might have already done it but you won't remember it, It's almost like you go up, die, bits come off (James Interview One)

In the first interview, James also suggested that, for him, the idea that heaven and hell is connected to the idea of ancestors

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I don't really believe in God but I believe in ancestors. I think past people that have died then go up to heaven, look down on you, help you through life (James, Interview One)

In the second interview James again contributes to the discussion about life and death and belief in God when he suggested that not believing in God and the afterlife are two separate things. However, unlike his responses in the first interview, his explanation of this point is not very coherent.

7.2.3 The meaning of life

Compared to some of the other discussions, the question of the meaning of life was relatively short, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain any development in the markers for existential

thinking. However, in interview two, Ada demonstrated a more confident attitude, suggesting she was more sure of herself and her beliefs.

In the first interview, the idea of there being any meaning of life was not discussed specifically, but the related idea of 'whether there is a purpose of life' was. Happiness was cited by James and Owen as the purpose of life, and Owen also suggested 'to enjoy yourself' when he states

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To enjoy yourself because if you don't enjoy yourself in life then there is really no point in living... if you don't enjoy yourself you are not being fair on yourself (Owen, First Interview)

The discussion moved onto the idea of happiness (6.2.2.7) in the first interview, but is returned to in the second interview. Like interview one, some of the responses are connected to the students' experiences and some insightful comments were made. Ada contributes well again when discussing the meaning of life, when she states it is 'to achieve…a challenge… or to make a change', and Seth states that it is 'Living life to the fullest and getting as much out of it as you can'. Unlike interview one, the focus of this discussion moved onto more religious themes, hinting at the ideas of reincarnation and karma which could be explained by the unit on Buddha they had studied. However, it is Ada who really speaks from her own personal perspective, showing a confidence not there in the first interview. She stated that

the meaning of life is not to be punished. I believe this as a Muslims I need to life a good life if I want to go to heaven

the meaning of life for me, like when I think about it, is to be a good Muslims and I am born to do this… to worship Allah the best I can
(Ada, Interview Two)

7.2.4 Happiness

Like the discussions on God and life after death there were some insightful comments made in both interviews on the issue of happiness. Most of the students (Ada, Owen, James and Laura) exhibited the basic markers for development in existential thinking: engagement with the questions and the ability to ask and answer questions of meaning. There is also evidence of some of the more advanced markers, such an emotional engagement with the issue of happiness, as well as participation in critical debate.

Responses to the question of what makes you happy ranged from friends, family (Owen), achievements (Owen, Ada) and making others happy (James). However, what really interested the group, was the idea of whether you could be happy all of the time and whether it was good for us to be happy all of the time. Owen replied to this question

No, because you wouldn't understand stuff. Like if you are always happy as a child you will not understand stuff when you are older. Stuff will probably happen more when you are older you won't understand what is happening
(Owen, First Interview)

James also objected to the idea that you cannot be happy all of the time using a reference to the film ‘Inside Out’ to demonstrate his view, stating

you’ve got the anger, the happiness, the sadness all of those work together to form the human you are (James, Interview One)

A similar point is also made by Laura, who added that the variety of emotions we experience in life helps us to develop as a person

If you are happy all of the time there is nothing really more to your life. You just known as that person who is always happy and can't really be sad but you need more emotions to build up who you are (Laura, Interview One)

James and Owen commented on the importance of trying to be happy, and how it can be ‘like a chain reaction’ (James) in helping others to be happy. Owen also observed that the power of a smile can contribute to general happiness, saying

When you smile at someone their most likely to smile back at you... just because they know you're happy they will smile back at you. Just don't do it on the streets in front of a stranger right near your house (Owen, Interview One)

Another concern discussed by the group was the things in life that do not, or should not, make you happy. This involved talking through why someone who was rich and famous would commit suicide when they had a life, with Laura commenting, ‘that some people could only wish they had’. Here, Seth makes one of his rare contributions, when he added

Some people money does not make them happy... it is their family which makes them happy (Seth, Interview One)

In the second interview, the discussions cover some of the same ground: whether the meaning of life was associated with happiness and why some people are not happy. James brings up the issue of emotions again and, asks whether, if life was all about happiness, we would have different emotions to draw on. However, the level of detail in the second interview was not the same as that in the first, so it is hard to see any more explicit developments in the markers for existential thinking in this question.

7.2.5 Destiny

The question on destiny and control did not generate the same sort of enthusiasm as that of God, life after death or happiness. It is therefore difficult to comment on any development in the markers for existential learning. However, in the first interview, the responses were based on an experiential interpretation of the question, for example, focusing on the power that parents and teachers have had over their lives (James and Owen), and that of the law and police (Owen). Seth said

Well, when you are older you have a bit more freedom but you still have guidance in a way because you can do what you want now. You have to be brought up in a way so you can guide yourself through the world (Seth, Interview One)

In the second interview, the discussion is even more limited and focused on the idea of whether you are born for a reason, to which Ada responded

> *I think over time I realise why I was born. I think that once a person grows up they know because everyone has a talent, so that person will grow to achieve many great things, if again if they do something good, even if you did something bad it would show the world that, that you were there for a reason again because you have shown the world what is good and what is bad. Yeah, so I don't know yet what I was born to do, but I think that everyone has a talent, including me (Ada, Interview One)*

7.2.6 Others topics

As the interviews were only semi-structured other related topics came up as part of the discussions, such as science and changing opinions.

The issue of science appeared in the first interview in connection to God's existence, in which Laura, Ada and Seth, initially discussed the idea of the big bang. Their debate shows many of the basic, and some of the more advanced markers for existential thinking: engagement with the questions, links made between what they do and do not believe, critical debate, emotional engagement with the issues and an openness to contested truth claims.

Laura spoke at length, about how the big bang made more sense to her than God, as science has more proof and God does not. Ada countered this using her knowledge of Islam, when she argued that God is not a something that can be made, and that a big bang also needed a cause. Owen joins in by expressing his view that he does not believe in the big bang, and that a 'bang'

could not have led to creation of the world. Ada, added that, as a religious person, it was possible to believe in God and the big bang, however, when it came to how the earth itself was created, she expressed doubt in some of the traditional stories which have God creating the world in only six days.

In the second interview, science appears again in a discussion over whether you can be religious and believe in science at the same time. Despite the discussion being shorter than the one in the first interview, there is evidence for many of the basic and more advanced markers of development in existential thinking. However, it was difficult to ascertain if any development had occurred because of the brevity of the exchange.

Seth commented that 'not believing is right in my view... because of science and all of that'. Ada, responds to this debate by referring to her religious background saying 'Allah for me is science … how do you think it all happened? Who caused the big bang?'. Ada also stated that you can be a Muslim and believe in science, and that 'not to believe is just as much a viewpoint as believing … who knows who it actually right, and sometimes I also agree with you'. This last phrase is interesting because, despite her confidence, she is still – at times – ambivalent over her religious beliefs.

The discussion over changing opinion only appeared in the second questionnaire when I asked the group if any of their views had changed over the year, and evidence can be seen of an engagement with the topics taught, an emotional response to what has been taught, an

openness to being enriched by the views of others, and - for most of the group - a re-evaluation of their viewpoints on religion.

Owen stated that he had not been ‘bothered about religion before’, and that he had realised that there was more to religion than he had realised. James said that he too had been challenged, in a good way, to understand what religion was about, and he gave the following example

> *For, like, Hinduism I thought that they didn't actually need that many gods but then, because they've got loads of gods but when they were explained they all mean one thing so I guess different people want different things to them so they pray to that one god (James, Interview Two)*

Laura also contributed to this discussion, stating that she had started the year thinking RE is just about religion and ‘I am not bothered’, but she now realised there was much more to RE. Ada also commented on how it has widened her viewpoints on religion and encouraged her to think more deeply. At the very end of the interview, I asked the group ‘Do you ever think, that makes sense to me?’ to which Owen responded ‘yes, the Buddha’. Unfortunately, he was unable to expand on his answer, partly because of time and partly because he did not want to, for when asked to explain he responded ‘because I just do’.

7.3 Learning Habits (Interviews)

The only learning habit to be mentioned explicitly in the first interview were managing distractions and listening, in an effort to keep the students focused in the interviews and to encourage them to listen to each other as well as they could.

In the second interview, there were specific questions asked about the learning habits. The responses were generally positive; however, in Laura's first response she commented that she has not developed many of the learning habits. On the one hand Laura's denial may question the reliability of this data, but knowing the student well I suspect at the moment she was asked this question, she had not connected the term 'learning habits' to the ideas of managing distractions, revising and preparation. She also goes on later to talk about several of the learning habits, contradicting her initial assertion. For example, on preparation, she commented that the discussions on this had helped her to be more organised for tests, and 'to feel good when I did well'.

Others in the group were more positive in their assessment of the learning habits from the outset. Saul mentions managing distractions saying 'you kinda drilled into our heads that we need to manage our distractions', and Owen agreed stating 'If we have not been taught that, then everyone would have been crazy'. The truth of these comments was also backed up in the field notes where, as a necessity, managing distractions was discussed with the class on a number of occasions over the year. Owen also commented on how the questioning learning habit had helped him to 'get involved more'. Ada added that in terms of the learning habits

that she now feels she can make better links, and stated ‘before I would just assume one thing and now if I assume one thing I try to see if anything links with it and expands it…’.

The group was also asked in interview two if any of the learning habits had particularly helped them in lessons. Developing resilience is suggested, but the one which came up the most in discussion was that of empathy. Both Ada and Lauren commented how, at the beginning of the year, they had assumed they were right in their views and did not see why others might think things differently to them. As Ada points out, putting yourself into someone else’s shoes and ‘makes us see from their perspective’ showing that not all people have the same views. They also commented that the learning habits, particularly ‘noticing’ had helped them to widen their viewpoints, which encouraged them to think more deeply about the issues discussed.

7.4 Concluding reflection

In the group interviews the questions asked in the questionnaire were explored in more detail. Some questions, as with the questionnaires, generated more interest than others: God, happiness and life after death, were popular, whereas other topics such destiny were not and as I have already commented upon it is not entirely clear why this was the case.

During the two interviews all of the those involved showed some ability in the basic markers for existential thinking: interest in existential questions and the ability to ask and answer questions of meaning. Some of the group (such as Ada and Lauren) could also engage with

some of the more advanced markers such as having a personal and emotional engagement with the issues discussed, and in this sense, there was no clear differences between the two interviews.

In the second interview there are some differences in attitude from the students with Ada, in particular showing more confidence. This may be a sign of a growing maturity or indeed the realisation that within all religions there can be a diversity of belief, particularly when it comes to the idea of God, and that she was not necessarily right about everything. Evidence to support the latter idea comes from a comment she make about how the learning habits have helped to 'widen her views' and that she now realises that there is a bigger picture than just her own beliefs.

The group were asked, in addition, to the existential questions derived from the questionnaires about the learning habits. They mention several but it is their comments on empathy, in particular, are interesting as they also reflect a pattern emerging from some of the case studies and comments made in the second questionnaire which suggest a shift in attitude for some students when this learning habit was taught to the class. There comments on some of the other habits, such as noticing, helping them to widen their viewpoints, also reflected some common themes beginning to emerge from the research intervention data which might support some connection between the learning habits and existential thinking.

CHAPTER 8

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: Student Work and Field Notes

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed (some of) the main findings from the two interviews carried out at the beginning and end of the curriculum intervention.

As with the previous chapter, in this chapter I am presenting evidence to answer my first two subsidiary research questions 'Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?' and 'Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?'. In this chapter I am looking for evidence from the students' written output and the field notes to illustrate any development in the markers for existential thinking, and how far the learning habits may or have supported this development.

During the research intervention, the students were asked to reflect on and to develop their leaning habits; this was combined with the completion of a number of tasks which encouraged the students to engage with existential questions and ideas. Alongside each lesson field notes were kept which comment on students' engagement with the existential questions and learning habits. Any relevant insights from these notes is presented alongside the students' written output.

8.2 Existential Thinking (Student Work and Field Notes)

8.2.1 God

Due to the nature of RE, the idea of God is discussed many times across all units of work. It was not until the second unit of work, however, that the idea of God was looked at 'officially' from a variety of religious and philosophical perspectives. I comment in my field notes that the issue of God's existence seems to interest more of the students and encouraged them to take part in the lesson. For example, James, in a discussion on 'whether belief in God was good for people or not?', goes on to suggest a number of different responses: one based on terrorism, and another on how belief in God can be a positive guide for life (14/02/17). Other students, who had not contributed before, also volunteered to read their speeches. In his learning diary Wyatt also acknowledges 'I need to try even harder to join in and put my hand up for questions and to share my belief about God'.

As with the questionnaires and interviews, many students had no reluctance to give their views on whether God exists or not; however, not everyone was as good writing about the views of others, particularly when they contradicted their own. Sacha, for example, says she is a theist and in a speech where the class was directed to include different points of view in detail, she writes

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I would consider myself as a theist because I go to church every Sunday and Christmas and they have told me things and now I believe in him. Another reason for my opinion is that even though scientists have not figured out who created the world I still think that God could be the only one who created the world and us. People may disagree with me but they have not figured it out yet and also have not read the bible where they could learn about God (Sacha, Assessment Task)

In the same piece of work, Laura writes

> *I don't believe in god because there is no evidence behind it. I would consider myself as an atheist. Another reason, who created god? Where is her? Why can't we see him? I am no way against people who believe in god. I just don't agree with that opinion. I see why people would disagree with me because they believe in god (Laura, Assessment Task)*

Other students' speeches showed that they could talk about differing points of view in a detailed balanced way, but some - such as Eva - do so with no obvious indication of her own point of view. However, this corresponds with her agnostic responses to the questionnaire.

The assessed task involved writing a speech which evaluated the differing views on the existence of God, and this existential question produced the most reflective pieces of work to this point in the intervention. The level of detail varied from student to student: not all evaluated their views, but many more of the students showed a development in the markers for existential thinking. More students were showed an interest in the existential questions, many showed they were listening to the views of others, and some were more emotionally involved and willing to revise their views. For example, Tim's writing indicates he is trying to explain why he believes in God, and the excerpt gives an insight into someone who is beginning to engage with the existential questions discussed:

> *People may disagree with me because there is no proof for the existence of god. They might say that science tells us how the world was created not religion, and will also say god does not answer the prayers of all people. Maybe he won't answer because he might be trying to help people make the world a better place? (Tim, Assessment Task)*

Mav's response to the idea of the existence of God shows her views and a consideration of the arguments against it. She writes

I am a theist as there is no proof that God is not real but also no evidence God is real. And if there was no pain and suffering people wouldn't know what good is (Mav, Assessment Task)

Alana and Olla's speeches about the existence of God are both show a change in belief from being atheist in the first questionnaire to having a believing in God. They write

Throughout this topic I have been considering my beliefs about God and reasons for and against believing in God. I have decided I am a theist due to the fact that something had to start the universe (Olla, Assessment Task)

I have decided that I am a polytheist. The reason this is, is I believe in the myths and legends of the Greek Gods, as they inspire and interest me more than other religious beliefs. I believe this as I find it hard to believe that only one God could create the universe (Alana, Assessment Task)

Seth too shows a change from his first questionnaire data where he indicates he is agnostic about God to his speech where you can see him definitely toying with the idea that God might not be real, to the result of his second questionnaire where he records he is an atheist. In his speech he writes:

I think that god is not real because there is no proof, there are no photos or anything that can show he is real. I can see why people would disagree with me because they might say that they were brought up by their families (religious) which maybe make them religious. So in conclusion I would say that god is not real but I'm agnostic as I am not 100% sure
(Seth, Assessed Work)

8.2.3 Life after Death

Life after death was not a standalone topic, and it was explored in several of the units of the lessons. One of the first times it appears is in section of work on ultimate questions completed early in the curriculum intervention. Most students responded to the question 'Is there life after death?' with an answer corresponding to their response in the first questionnaire. However, the responses from some students showed evidence for their views having being enriched by someone else, which is one of the higher markers for existential thinking.

Alana's response to the idea of life after death corresponded with her response to the first questionnaire where she described life after death in terms of bodies decaying and becoming fertiliser for the soil, but in her exercise book she included more of a spiritual perspective, suggesting the idea that you might live on

> *From the fertilised soil grows a plant which has its own fruit. An animal comes across this and eats it. Their body now contains your DNA which means their child is you. You will not remember as you have lost your memory, but this is why we do not know (Alana, Exercise Book)*

Her change is also noted upon in the second questionnaire where her response also refers to the idea of spirits and rebirth.

The old man, a dead man and the sick man represent that we will all experience old age, sickness and death. This could help us when grieving for a loved one that we have lost. Buddha had never met these people before but still got upset with what he saw and how this

represented life and how we have to accept we have no control over our fate and that it will happen to us and the people around us (Olla, Assessed Work). Eva also speculated on the idea of life after death in one of the very last activities of the year, and her response showed her to be considering a variety of perspectives on the issue. She writes

I think there is a heaven because some people say every star at night represents every person that has dies.

Heaven might not exist because of reincarnation. Reincarnation is life after death so we do not need to go to heaven before we reincarnate.

Also, are we someone's dream? If we are an everlasting dream then we won't need heaven because we are not real (Eva, Exercise Book)

Her answers are in contrast to her less detailed response to the first questionnaire, where she simply states

I think I would be buried and I'm not sure whether you go up to heaven or hell depending on whether you've been good or bad
(Eva, Questionnaire One)

Other responses on the issue of life after death, such as Maria's, are similar to their first questionnaire. Maria wrote

I feel you will be born again and live your life again and whatever we do we have already does this before many times before
(Maria, Questionnaire One)

And in her exercise book she writes again, perhaps in a little more detail about reincarnation:

‘Yes, I do think there is life after death… after you pass away your mind shuts down. I believe that you are reborn again… but we have no memory of what you did before’ (Maria, Exercise Book)

The unit of work on the Buddha and the four sights provoked a lot of discussion over the issue of death, and although there was not a question in the questionnaires specifically on death, it was noteworthy how the topic elicited thoughtful responses from the students, which showed they had allowed the views learnt on the Buddha and death to enrich their own perspectives. Martha, for example, advises a person who is suffering bereavement from the death of their cat to be strong, and - as difficult as it may be - to try and let go, as wanting your pet causes craving which in turn causes suffering. In the same task, Otis also writes

I am deeply sorry for the death of your feline friend, you are craving for him, you wish him back. This is craving and it causes suffering – it happens at death to the best of us (Otis, Exercise Book)

8.2.3 What is Happiness?

The module ‘What is Happiness?’ on the life of Buddha and his teachings seemed to strike a nerve with many of the students, and the practical nature of many of Buddha’s teachings on happiness seem to lead to there being more interest in the existential questions studied. There were also signs that some students, as with the topic on life after death, were allowing their views to become enriched by the perspectives they were studying. The enrichment can be seen through some examples of the students’ work (see below), and is noted in field notes, when some of the students commented that learning about Buddha had encouraged them to think differently about the issue of happiness and want (26/06/17).

After studying the Buddha's ideas on happiness and suffering, the students were asked to respond to a problem page as if they were the Buddha. While, the written work varies in its level of detail, most students write a good response, showing not only their knowledge of relevant Buddhist teachings, but also their ability to reflect on their understanding of the Buddha's view of happiness. For example, in answer to a teenage girl who is upset her mum will not buy her the latest fashions, Alana writes

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You are being blinded by one of the three poisons. This poison is greed. You only want luxuries, not anything that you need in order to survive
(Alana, Exercise Book)

In another lesson on Buddha and happiness, the students were given a task to comment on when they thought Buddha was happy in his life and why. There were many contributions to this task, but some of them were from students who had previously been passive in lesson. The field notes record that Zain remarked 'it was easier to empathise with Buddha's views on happiness than they thought' (26/05/17).

The life and teachings of Buddha continued to be a popular topic with the students which provoked some interesting responses; when asked what they had found the most interesting about the teachings or life of Buddha, and whether any of his ideas make any sense to them, some students commented that his attitudes to suffering had really made them consider what was important to them in life. In the field notes I comment on how some students were more critical and felt Buddha's ideas went too far: James talked about craving being important for

humans, otherwise we would all still be living in caves. In response, Stephen suggested craving could also involve wanting justice which is also important for happiness - which surely is a positive aim. There were also a few comments about how students could see the point of what Buddha was trying to say about happiness and how it had encouraged them to reflect more on their personal views (Field Notes, 26/06/2017).

The end of unit assessed piece of work entitled 'Can Buddha's teachings make us happy?', demonstrated a good understanding of Buddhist religious teachings and, for some students, the complexities of the Buddhist views on happiness. Wyatt wrote 'I believe that Buddha's teachings cannot make us completely happy, because no one can be always happy' (Assessment Task). Other responses included Jim who wrote, 'I think Buddha's teachings make us think about how we live our lives and make us think about other people' (Assessment Task), and Leo who writes about the benefits of meditation (which we looked at in relation to the 8-fold path) and how religious and non-religious people can use it to help them to be happier in life (Exercise Book).

8.3 Learning Habits

The learning habits were taught and developed in the classroom in a number of different ways. Using both the students work and the field notes in this next section I will explore how the

students reacted to the learning habits: what they wrote, what they said and my observations of behaviour. [7]

8.3.1 Empathy

As a learning habit, the reaction to 'Empathy' was interesting. Many of the students initially recorded in their learning diaries the meaning of the term based on the 'I can/I cannot' chart. Alana writes 'I feel I can put myself in someone's shoes and feel what they are feeling'. In the field notes I noted that when filling in the learning diaries I encouraged the students to think carefully where they were on the 'I can/I cannot' chart in order for them to create a success criteria. In creating a success criteria for empathy, the students suggested that they needed to 'listen', 'notice', and 'make links' in order to do this: Wyatt wrote that in order to empathise better, 'he needed to listen more to what others think' (9/1/17).

In the lesson itself, when the 'empathy' learning habit was introduced to the class, some students related empathy to RE, commenting that in order to learn from religions and other people 'you need to be prepared to put yourself into their shoes', and to make links between your life and theirs. Others added that you needed to use your imagination, listen carefully and put your own views temporarily to one side, in order to 'attempt to understand where someone else was coming from'. It was interesting that the link between 'empathy' and RE

[7] Some learning habits are paired as they were discussed/used in conjunction with each other.

was made by a student who had been negative about RE (Field Notes, 09/01/17); it was in this lesson that a shift in attitude to the subject was first witnessed.

Other students struggled more with the idea of empathy. Martha wrote 'I listen to other viewpoints but I will not think about that view' (9/1/17) and Otis noted 'I listen but am not sympathetic in any way' (9/1/17). Emma also wrote, 'I find it difficult to put my view behind' by which she meant she found her own views getting in the way of trying to understand others' views (9/1/17). Later comments from some of these students shows a different view: Martha significantly stated that she is now able to 'to think deep and concentrate'. Otis also shows some development when he wrote in his learning diary that, in a lesson on the Buddha, he had succeeded in empathising with aspects of his story. In the second review, carried out towards the end of the research, development in the empathy learning habit can be seen in the comments of several students. Wyatt writes that 'I can empathise better then I used to because I have tried harder to empathise and hear out what other people are saying'. Anna also observed that the learning habits have helped her 'to learn from others'. Eva wrote 'The learning habits have helped me by giving me more confidence to say my ideas and it has helped me to empathise more easily with other people's options and how things can be different in their viewpoint'. Maria also noted 'In RE the learning habits have helped me place myself in other people's shoes and talk from their point of view'.

Overall, the lesson on the empathy learning habit seemed to make the greatest difference for most students in terms of their personal engagement with the ideas studied in the classroom.

Their change in attitude was also echoed in the questionnaire where several students reflected that it was when we discussed empathy that they realised that it was acceptable not only to think about their own views, but also to consider those of other people. The change was also observed in the written work on belief, faith and God and - in particular - the speeches for and against the existence of God, when students who had engaged less in the lessons spoke up. The subject matter also helped, as most students had an opinion on the issue of God's existence. Martha commented, 'During this topic I have been considering my beliefs about God to be changed, as many people have points and views towards God, those points question my views'; Wyatt acknowledges 'I need to try even harder to join in and put my hand up for questions. And put my hand up to share my belief about God' (Second Learning Review).

8.3.2 Making Links

As a distinct learning habit, 'making links' was the focus of several lessons, but it was first highlighted in a lesson on how beliefs affect actions. Some of the students commented that this learning habit encouraged them to see the links between the content they were studying, and to make links between their own views and those of the religious individuals we were looking at. However, I also observed one or two students who believed that there could be no similarities between their views and those of religious people. One of the class activities on a religious character required the students to identify the most appropriate learning habit for the task and why: some talked about 'making links' and 'listening', but 'noticing' was also put forward to ensure they spotted relevant ideas in the written information. Many of the students were clearly getting better at identifying the relevant habits, which I recorded in my field notes (28/11/16). 'Making links' was also recorded as essential for trying to develop the 'empathy'

learning habit, and Otis stated in his learning diary that he needed 'to think about other people's views', by 'making links between his own views and the views of others'.

Others lacked confidence with the ability to 'make links', and stated that they give up too easily or did not put the effort in to do this. Olla wrote in her learning diary that 'sometimes I give up easily when I am not interested in it so I don't focus and don't spot links', and Maria wrote, 'I don't think I try and think or notice random details'.

8.3.3 Managing Distractions and Listening

In the first instance, the students looked at two key learning habits: 'managing distractions', and 'listening'. These two were returned to when necessary throughout the research intervention, and the focus of the class was noticeably better when these habits were foregrounded. Many of the students commented in their diaries that they sometimes struggled to manage their distractions: Emma commented, 'I am not good at concentrating' (21/5/17) and Chris also noted, 'I talk and mess around a lot and I could do with blocking out distractions' (21/3/17). Managing distractions was also included in the success criteria for many of the other learning habits, which emphasised its role as a key learning habit, examples include: noticing (Eva, Chris, Seth), to make links (Eva, Stephen, Seth), working in a team (Eva, Stephen), reasoning (Chris, Harrison) perseverance (Stephen, Seth, Holly).

The development of the 'listening' learning habit also appears several times in the field notes. Sometimes, 'listening' was developed on its own and the activities undertaken by the students

to develop it seemed to be appreciated by group: when asked what they had learnt, one student observed that 'we need to listen to learn' (Field Notes,12/05/17). Also, when asked to rate their progress with the listening learning habit, one student wrote that they had never been told how to improve their listening before, and it had made a difference to how much they had learnt in the lesson (22/11/16). Many of the students also mentioned the idea of listening when writing success criteria for other learning habits. An example of this occurs in a lesson on happiness where the ability to listen well is cited in the field notes as being an important habit to develop in order to be able to reflect and consider ideas from students' own, and others', perspectives (Field Notes,16/05/17). Maria stated in her learning diary that in order to reason better, she needed to listen more to the views of others (6/12/16). Emma also wrote in her learning diary that to empathise better she needed to listening better (9/1/17). Conversely, Martha wrote in her learning diary that she felt she had done well using her reasoning learning habit because 'I was listening and thinking about my reasons' (6/12/16).

8.3.4 Metacognition and planning

As part of the meta-learning habit, Metacognition was not discussed formally as a learning habit with the class until later in the research intervention. However, it was introduced as part of a developing a metacognitive learning environment, and the students were also told that when they reflect in their learning diaries this was also a form of metacognition as I was asking them to monitor their own learning and change strategies when needed. Using the 'I can/I cannot' chart as inspiration, the success criteria for metacognition were created by the students, and included being honest with oneself, to act on feedback, and to be willing to revise one's opinion. Anna notes in her learning diary that she listens to feedback and will act

on it, but she does not always really believe that they have improved, and her attitude was something they needed to work on. Zain wrote, ‘I don’t believe in myself’ and Offa that ‘I need to take my learning seriously and listen more’. Others like Seth wrote that they needed to be more honest with themselves and Stephen who comments he does not always take advice and he should. Many of the lessons included aspects of metacognitive learning and this was picked up by the students on several occasions, as commented in my field notes (11/01/17 and 10/05/17). Also noted was a comment made by a student, when asked what do they learn about in RE, he commented ‘we have to think hard about what we think and why we think it’ (28/06/17).

Planning was looked at in every assessment lesson and most of the comments pertaining to it as a habit appear in the field notes. The exam wrapper tasks were successful in helping the students to plan, Seth comments in his diary ‘I did not know you could revise in so many different ways. This has really helped me know what to do.’ (28/06/17). Other students also comment on the exam wrappers as being helpful, but Harrison and one or two other students are not impressed that they have to do more to revise than just look in their books (11/01/17). However, there attitude does improve throughout the year. Other students also seem to appreciate that planning can be important but Holly points out that sometimes it is good ‘just to go with it’ (11/01/17).

8.3.5 Noticing

As with other learning habits, success criteria for ‘noticing’ were suggested by the students based on the ‘I can/I cannot’ chart. The criteria included paying attention and listening, as the students felt you have got to be doing both to notice anything. In her learning diary, Holly commented that they sometimes fail to notice well, as they find the ideas we look at difficult and lose confidence. In the same vein, Anna recorded that if she gets something wrong this can affect their confidence and they can lose the ability to notice well. Some of the students are honest enough to say they do not always notice well when they get bored, but Owen comments they need to ‘sit up and observe even if bored’.

In the lessons where noticing was the main learning habit it had the effect of ensuring the students paid more attention and this renewed focus is also recorded in the field notes. Jim stated that he liked the emphasis on ‘learning habits’ as it helps him to ‘think more clearly’ (Field Notes, 16/11/16). Using the noticing learning habits in other lessons also helped to ensure that students were less were less passive and one even volunteered their own views (Field Notes, 29/02/17).

In terms of developing any personal engagement with the materials studied, it is difficult to see whether it is the learning habit or the content itself which facilitates this change. However, in the second review, held towards the end of the research intervention, Otis wrote ‘I have also used my noticing skills to notice other people’s opinions’, which suggests that the idea of paying attention to the views of others contributed to some students noticing the views of

others, which they may not otherwise have done. Significantly, noticing was also recorded as a key component of developing empathy, and it is during and after the empathy lesson that a change is seen in the way that some of the students engage with the subject and their written work becomes more detailed and introspective.

8.3.6 Perseverance and resourcefulness

Perseverance was not introduced formally as a learning habits but done so gradually. The class had generally shown they were capable of persevering, as it seemed to be a learning habit which had been promoted at some of the primary schools. There was only one occasion, as noted in the field notes, when I had to remind the class of how to persevere well after a half-term break where they had come back and were not being very resilient. Perseverance also appeared in the success criteria for some of the other learning: Emma recorded in her first learning review it as something she need to think about when trying to 'make links' between differing topics and ideas. Offa that perseverance especially when he finds something boring (31/03/17).

Resourcefulness is linked to perseverance as they were often discussed together as being looking at different resources was a key tool in being able to preserver. Being resourceful was commented upon by the students in assessment lessons

8.3.7 Reasoning and Questioning

The 'reasoning' and 'questioning' learning habits were introduced together as part of a lesson on ultimate questions. In the field notes I noted that the students were able to identify 'reasoning' and 'questioning' as the main learning habits involved in the lesson tasks, and some of the suggestions of how to improve included being able to listen better, notice details and consider different points of view. In response to these ideas, Imogen made an interesting point when she commented that you needed to 'want' to see different views and that people are not always interested in doing because 'they do not see the point' (6/12/16).

'Reasoning' is returned to as the main learning habit focus in another lesson on the idea of faith, and the field notes show many more students contributing to this lesson than previously. Owen also linked the idea of empathy to reasoning (a learning habit addressed in the previous lessons), commentating that empathy could help you to reason better because it involves you trying to understand someone's views by putting to one side your own views. When asked why this was important, he stated that not putting your own views to the side could distract you from trying to understand objectively (Field Notes, 23/01/17). Students who found the reasoning learning habit difficult included Harrison who commented in his learning diary 'I need to be more open minded and not judge too quickly' (23/01/17). This also made sense of a comment made later by the same student when he explained that he could not add in reasons for the existence of God (to show he understood them) to his speech because this was against this view (14/02/17).

The 'questioning' learning habit was bound up with that of reasoning, but as a distinct habit it was addressed in several lessons by looking at different types of questions, how to formulate them and the benefits of asking them. The students responded well to this learning habit and were able to give accurate examples of closed and open questions and existential-type questions, such as 'why do people do bad things?' (06/12/16). The idea of questioning was returned to on several occasions but was not addressed specifically again until the end of the research, when the students took part in a P4C enquiry activity (10/07/17).

8.3.8 Revising

'Revising' was built into the lessons from the beginning to such an extent that when I did mention the learning habit, one student commented to the class that they do this 'meta-learning' all the time and that it was an important habit to develop (26/04/17). 'Revising' was also an important aspect of one of the lessons near the end of the research intervention: in this lesson on the teachings of Buddha, some of the students commented on how they had changed their views or how they feel, having been encouraged to reflect upon the issues raised in lessons (26/06/2017).

8.3.9 Working in teams

Unlike some of the other learning habits working in teams or collaboration is the least mentioned learning habit. As noted in the field notes, this learning habit was talked about in the lessons to remind students of their responsibilities to each other as a class. It was also mentioned when students used the 3B4 ME strategy, as the students could use each other as resources (12/12/16 and 11/01/17). In the learning diaries Ada commented that 'I worked well

with others. It was good to think about who does not' and her target was 'not to take over' (30/11/16).

8.4 Concluding reflection

Both in the students' written output and records in the field notes show a number of interesting trends. As the year progressed, there was evidence that many of the students had become confident in their abilities and were happier to get involved and read out sections of their work to the class. In the second learning review, Anna commented that learning about the learning habits has among other things 'helped her to contribute and give my opinions to the class'. My field notes show that others wanted to show me what they had written as I walked around the room, and to talk to me about its contents. Some of the work I saw was increasingly introspective, and - for some - there was also an engagement with others' the views. Overall, the attitudes of some students to RE were much more positive than they had been at the beginning of the intervention. Others both publicly and privately confessed that the lessons had encouraged them to listen better to the views of others, and to understand that there are different ways of seeing the world. Seth stated in the second learning review that the learning habits had helped him 'to improve his focus'.

Not only did the students, make comment in the lessons without being prompted but throughout their written responses to the influence these habits have had on their work, there were changes in attitude which coincided with the teaching of specific habits, such as empathy (Stephen's case study).

The changes and improvements could be explained by the subject content chosen and the consequence of their natural development after nearly a year at secondary school. Whilst I accept that these and other variables may be part of the picture, I would hold that the systematic teaching of the learning habits played a role in the improvement of the existential thinking of the students, with many making progress in the markers of existential thinking. There was increasing engagement with the existential questions, where - for some students - there has been none or very little, and more students were able to ask and answer questions of meaning and to make it clear in what they did, and did not believe. For some, a willingness to see beyond the 'knowledge' presented in the lessons, and an to appreciation of the values or meaning behind the ideas can be seen. From some, there was more emotional engagement with the subject matter, and some even allowed the views of others to enrich their own.

CHAPTER 9

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: CASE STUDIES

9.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the main findings from the student written work and field notes carried out during the curriculum intervention. In this chapter I present the findings of the intervention through the eyes of five case studies from the research class, representing the main responses to the intervention, in terms of the development of learning habits and existential thinking. The case studies are

- Stephen - the ardent atheist
- Ada - the sceptic believer
- Martha - the searcher for meaning
- Sonia - the devout believer
- Leo - the uninterested materialist

Each case study draws its findings from the data generated by the classroom intervention consisting of two class questionnaires carried out at the beginning and end of the intervention (appendices 3, 4); students' work and learning diaries (see sample -appendices 9 and 10) and the teaching field notes (see a sample -appendix 11). Martha's case study also draws on two group interviews carried out on (28/11/16) and (05/07/17), (appendix 7 and 8).

9.2 Stephen – the ardent atheist

Stephen came from a higher socioeconomic background and was an able student who, based on his KS2 results, was expected to achieve the higher grades at GCSE (7-9). He was outwardly confident, and happy to share his views and contribute to lessons. He seemed to be well-liked by his peers but did not consider himself to be 'popular', nor did he care that this was the case. He described himself as being interested in sports such as tennis and football like his friends, but there was a sense in which he was also quite aloof from and different to those around him. His aloofness was reflected in some of his answers in the first questionnaire: in Q12 the students were asked 'Do you think there is anything unique or special about you?' to which Stephen stated, 'there is no-one who thinks the same as me'; then in Q14 ('Is being happy important to you?') he wrote 'What is the point of living when you are sad?'. Despite the terse nature of these answers there was a sense that behind this was a deep thinker who has more to say; however, I was unable to question him further, as he did not consent to be interviewed.

Stephen's development with regard to the BLP learning habits and existential thinking during the research period (October 2016-July 2017), is shown in the following cross-section of data.

9.2.1 Initial Resistance

Stephen's responses in the first questionnaire demonstrated that he was more than capable of answering existential questions, so they show he had some competence in some of the very basic markers for development in existential thinking such as being able to answer questions of meaning and making links to what he did and did not believe. Despite this, Stephen's answers were initially very short and lacked detail. For example, when asked for an explanation

of his view in Q7 of the questionnaire (‘Do you believe in God?’) he wrote ‘I think evolution gives more possible reasons and also why would innocent people be dying around the world’. The terse nature of his responses is also reflected in his class work in the first half of the research intervention: whilst doing what was needed, what he wrote was often very brief with little or no explanation. For example, the question ‘What is worth most to you?' was answered by Stephen as ‘Being with my family’. From the start he demonstrated awareness of religious concepts, such as karma and sin: for instance in Q11 of the questionnaire (‘Do you think we will be punished for our sins?’) he wrote ‘I believe in karma because people should be punished for their sins’.

In the first learning review, conducted at the beginning of the intervention, Stephen gave the first indications of how well he saw himself as a learner. He stated

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I am fantastic at contributing in a variety of different ways…I give thoughtful answers…as well as thinking outside the box and I think I could improve on being less of a leader and help a lot more people in the teamwork parts of the lesson (Stephen, First Learning Review)

Stephen was confident in his abilities as a learner, and he knew he contributed well. His remark about ‘being less of a leader’ reflected his ability to get involved in discussions and lead group work which he did from the start of the year. However, he also seemed to acknowledge here that he could take over and not let others contribute. This is connected to Stephen’s characteristics of liking to be right, and to be correct in what he did (a personal characteristic he admitted to in a later learning review). This attitude towards his abilities was fine in

activities which focused on the acquisition of knowledge, such as ‘what does polytheist mean?’ and ‘where do Sikhs worship?’, where there are right and wrong answers. However, when the lessons turned more to the consideration of existential questions and issues - where there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer but could be many - Stephen found them more difficult to deal with. In the field notes, I observed on several occasions that when I, or another student, challenged Stephen over an idea, he would be visibly irritated and sometimes disparaging to any view which disagreed with his own.

Stephen was openly atheistic in his views and he seemed to remain firm in this conviction for the duration of the research intervention; however, this alone was not a reason for his irritation, as there were other students who also claimed to be atheist who did not behave in the same way. A clue as to why he got so irritated over being challenged appears in his learning diary: in relation to being patient and listening to others he wrote, ‘I feel I get fidgety and depressed when I get something wrong…’. It is clear from this comment that when Stephen was challenged, he felt he was getting something wrong, rather than realising there was no wrong answer, that there could be several different answers, and that it was okay not to know.

An example of Stephen’s reluctance to engage with any personal learning occurred near the beginning of the research intervention. One of the tasks the students were asked to complete involved them completing an image of their own special space. After unpacking the idea of worship and discussing the different ways in which we can all show something is ‘worthy’ in our lives, the students were asked to create their own special space or place of worship (if they

were happy using this terminology); their space was to be personal to them and include anything they valued in life. Many of the students came up with interesting ideas reflecting their personal concerns, beliefs, and values. However, despite not being religious (Stephen's own words) he drew what looked like a church with stained glass and a holy book. After seeing this work, I asked Stephen and some other students why they had just reproduced a church, despite my instructions that it should reflect their personal concerns, values and beliefs and he commented that he did not understand why I would be asking for his views or ideas, as RE was about religion which had nothing to do with him as he is an atheist.

Until this point, Stephen had shown himself to be a good student - he had completed the work set and contributed to discussions - however, he was very sure of the rightness of his own views, and it seemed that he tolerated studying RE because he had to. His dismissive responses to religious interpretations of some of the material we studied in lesson also confirmed that he was confident that his view was obviously the correct one and others' views were not.

Stephen's reaction to the task on special places may have several explanations. On one hand, he was quite black and white in his thinking and, despite his view that he was good at thinking 'outside the box', he found it difficult, or was reluctant to, respond to tasks which were either designed to bridge a student's personal experiences to religion or to challenge worldviews and encourage introspection. Connected to this was possibly the style of RE which he had been used to at primary school which, from the comments some of the students had made, was factual and did not require much personal response from the students. Stephen, despite being

outwardly confident, was also quite unsure of himself and liked to be seen to get things right and this was confirmed by his comment that when he got things wrong, he would feel 'depressed'. I also sensed from him that he was wary about what I was trying to do and retrospectively, I can see why he objected to this task because if only religious people had views on such issues then what I asked him to do may have seemed suspicious. The topic itself may also have not been helpful, as it was part of the introductory unit of work, which by its nature was more on religious literacy, and so using a bridging activity like asking the students to create their own special place may have been misunderstood.

9.2.2 Personal engagement

Over the first term, Stephen became less suspicious when I asked him to complete personal response activities. For example, in a lesson on the ninety-nine names of Allah, the students were asked to come up with 'the nine names of me' to which Stephen gave a very honest view of himself as a person, possibly showing more confidence in expressing personal information about himself. He wrote

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The nine names of me
The Hard Worker,
the neat,
THE MISERABLE,
the wise,
the abnormal,
the do-er,
the lone worker.
(Stephen, Exercise Book)

It is in these tasks on Hindu deities, based on the criteria for development in existential thinking, that there is evidence of some development in which Stephen was beginning to show more interest with the materials he was being taught. In another section of work on the Big Questions, his work began to include some personal reflection and interest with the religious views themselves. For example, the students were asked which of three religious responses to the question 'Why people do bad things?' made the most sense or is the most interesting to them, and Stephen wrote

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Christianity is the response which I find interesting because it says 'each human is born with a tendency towards evil. I find this interesting as could everyone really be a part of evil? Although I agree as everyone does something slightly bad (Stephen, Exercise Book)

Evidence for development in existential thinking also comes from the two questionnaires and particularly in his answer to Q3 ('Do you believe in God?'): in the first questionnaire Stephen's answer is very short, when he wrote

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I think evolution gives more possible reasons and also why would innocent people be dying around the world (Stephen Questionnaire One)

However, his response in Questionnaire Two is more detailed and even though he covers some of the same ground by asking why God allows bad things to happen, he also speculated on what he might believe if God did exist. He goes on to comment that Buddha's teachings have shown him that he can find his own inner peace, suggesting another reason as to why for him there is no need for God. He writes

I believe if god does exist it would be in a trinity form, he would be split into the holy spirit, the son and the father, that would explain how he could see us all. However, I have another opinion if he existed this would mean I was a polytheist; meaning there could be many gods. But why do bad things happen? And Buddha's teaching's show me you can find your own inner peace (Stephen Questionnaire Two)

In his responses Stephen showed from the very beginning that he understood what an existential question was and could attempt to answer them. However, in the second questionnaire his responses are more confident: showing what he beliefs and evidence of learning from the topics covered in class. What is different, is that Stephen's views later showed evidence of being enriched by those of other religions (Buddhism in particular), and more of an openness to some form of personal re-evaluation as a result of what he had learnt.

9.2.3 Learning Habits: Empathy

From the beginning of the research intervention, I had systematically introduced the BLP learning habits to the students. One of the learning habits talked about in lessons at every given opportunity was that of metacognition and the importance of personal honesty in the learning progress. This led to Stephen commenting on how he thought he was progressing.

After a lesson where I had introduced the Empathy learning habit, Stephen wrote in his learning diary that as a target he could respond more to the views of others and be more open-minded. His perceived lack of empathy is also seen in his second formal learning self-review in which he made a similar comment. However, in a later remark in his exercise book Stephen

also admitted 'I would like to be able to change my opinions on other people's statements', and this small break-through suggests that he was self-aware of how he saw the views of others and wanted to be more open to them. This again shows again development in the more advanced markers for existential thinking: here, he was not just interested in such questions and his own views, but was now becoming conscious of what others might think, and how he might take the views of others more seriously.

As part of a unit of work on Buddha, students were asked to apply what they had learnt to the life of Buddha. For example, they were asked to reflect on questions such as 'Can we empathise why Buddha was unhappy after experiencing the four sights?' and 'Has Buddha a point when he states that wanting causes craving?'. As with most of his later tasks, Stephen's written work in response to these questions engaged more with the religious concepts. He wrote

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Buddha does have a point as craving is something that can come back and cause you to feel insecure (Stephen, Exercise Book)

The assessment for the happiness unit of work involved answering the question 'Can Buddha's teachings make us happy?'. This response shows that Stephen had a good knowledge and understanding of Buddha's teachings, and that he could express his own viewpoint in relation to the existential questions discussed. Furthermore, he could now also articulate and consider the views of others. Stephen wrote

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On the one hand, his teachings make us reflect and realise the greater things in life. His teachings could also get us through hard times such as death of a loved one' and 'On the other hand… some people use their

luxuries for the greater good, like a computer; the most expensive one usually included more things which would help with school and work life (Stephen, Exercise Book)

In the second questionnaire, where the students were asked four additional questions about the learning habits, Stephen listed those in which he believed he has made the most progress, and these included his ability to manage his distractions, to listen and answer questions. He commented on how the learning habits had helped him to reflect, but he also pointed out 'I'm not good at empathy as I usually believe I am always right, that is something I am working on'. Stephen also noted 'that exploring the different learning habits in RE has helped me to become a better RE student' and by way of explanation he continued that 'they have improved the way I work and have helped me to become more inquisitive'.

At the end of the year, we returned specifically to existential questions by using the P4C philosophical enquiry method. Students were asked to respond to an image and come up with an open question about or inspired by the image; in various arrangements of groups, students then came up with one question they liked which was added to a list, and students voted on the one question they wanted to discuss. The person to come up with one of the most existential questions was Stephen who simply asked 'Why are we here?' and this was one discussed as a class. His written response to this task shows he was by this stage capable of looking at such questions from different points of view. He stated

We may be in the world to leave your mark and inspire others…We could be here to improve the world; say you are paint on a canvas you can improve the artwork (Stephen, Exercise Book)

Overall, Stephen's responses to the existential questions in the second questionnaire were more detailed. His answer to Q10 ('Does this life have any meaning for you?') was more detailed than his previous response. He wrote

'If you live your life and inspire others it could change, their life and what they do and aspire to. In addition, it could be so we can change the world. However, on the other hand we destroy the environment and can end others lives' (Stephen, Questionnaire Two)

Stephen's responses also seem to have been influenced by some of the content studied over the year and particularly the life and teachings of the Buddha. I recognise this is also a major variable when it comes to looking at the cause of his improved existential thinking, but it is only part of a bigger picture.

In response to Q7 ('Do you believe in God?') he stated that learning about the teachings of Buddha had shown him that 'you find your own inner peace'. This comment suggests that Stephen had reflected upon what he had learnt in lesson, and was using it to formulate his own meaning in life.

9.2.4 Summary

As seen in his first formal self-assessment, Stephen had quite a high opinion of his own ability in the learning habits, while his ability to ask questions and give his view (some of the basic marks of development in existential thinking) was evident from the beginning. However, this ability did not initially translate into his written work, and at times he seemed to ignore (or be incapable of) following instructions to complete tasks from any viewpoint but his own, or to show an appreciation of the others' views. Stephen pointed out quite early on that he needed to improve his empathy learning habit, and it becomes clear from the evidence over the year that it is possibly this which hindered his ability to engage with views not his own.

The detail in Stephen's work and his personal engagement improved over the year, which corresponds with many of the markers for development in existential thinking. This also coincides with the opportunities given in the scheme of work to unpick the learning habits required to improve the detail of students' written work and their personal engagement. A similar development is seen through the unpicking of the empathy learning habit which seems to have encouraged Stephen to be more aware of the views of others and the importance of listening to them. It is also noticeable that his earlier inability to make personal responses to some of the work changed and developed.

It is clear from the evidence over the year that it may have been a lack of empathetic ability which had hindered Stephen's ability to engage with views which are not his own. For him, engaging with others was also a confidence issue, and when he realised that he did not have

to get it right to look intelligent, he seemed to become more attentive to the views of others. Stephen remarked that when his views were challenged, he saw it as 'getting it wrong' and this made him depressed. The act of learning about empathy also seemed to motivate him to understand that other views were worth studying and that he was not necessarily right about everything. It is difficult to say whether Stephen was truly empathetic, or had developed a better understanding of what empathy involved. Either way, over the course of the year, he changed from being of one the most cynical members of the class to being one of the most engaged. He increasingly demonstrated many of the higher markers of existential thinking: rather than dismissing the views of others, he listened to them and modified his ideas when necessary. His developing ability to empathise moved him away from being defensive about his viewpoints to become someone who was willing to engage in debate and discuss differing points of view. He had not become religious, but he had developed a willingness to engage in existential thinking.

9.3 Ada – Sceptical believer

Like Stephen, Ada was an able student, from a higher socioeconomic background, and was expected to achieve higher grades at GCSE (7-9). She was outgoing, unafraid of voicing her views on a variety of topics and was happy to be part of the group interview. From a Muslim background, Ada often spoke about going to the Mosque with her family, and the influence of this background could be heard in many of her contributions to lessons and class work. Although Ada sometimes showed a scepticism of her faith, she was still very assured of her own opinion and ability to be right in what she says, which was evident in her attitude in

lessons and the way she conducted herself in the first interview. Where she was less confident was in her relationship with her cultural background and faith.

Ada was one of the small number of students who consented to be interviewed at the beginning and end of the intervention, so I was able to question her more closely about her views. Unfortunately Ada was absent for the second questionnaire, so no data on that exists for her.

Ada's development with regard to the BLP learning habits and existential thinking during the research period (October 2016-July 2017) is shown in the following cross-section of data.

9.3.1 Wrestling with upbringing

I labelled Ada as the 'Sceptical believer' because although she often answered questions and responded to issues in lesson from a Muslim perspective, she regularly demonstrated an ambivalent attitude to the faith in which she was being brought up: when talking about going to the Mosque or learning how to read the Qur'an she did not always speak with enthusiasm or warmth. Her reluctance could be explained by her answer to Q7 in the first questionnaire ('Do you believe in God?') to which she responded by saying

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I believe in god for the facts in my religion and what my family follow but I don't quite think I believe in god and that is my perspective
(Ada, First Questionnaire)

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and, by her answer to Q15 ('Do you think you are in control of your life?') where she stated

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I want to be in charge of my life but my parents keep controlling me (Ada, First Questionnaire)

Both answers seem to indicate an internal struggle with the traditions and expectations of her family, in terms of how she was expected to believe in God, and her own developing views which were more sceptical of such beliefs. This is demonstrated the recording of the first interview where in response to a question about the existence of God, she said

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Yes, like I am supposed to believe in God because of my religion but it's like from my opinion I don't (Ada, First Interview)

Similarly her answer to Q8 in the first questionnaire ('If there is a God, what is God like?') is interesting as she offered a view and then tried to distance herself from it. She wrote

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A god would always have reasons for what it/he/she does. It/he/she would always choose the right option and the right paths but as I have said before people who believe in god would choose this answer (Ada, First Questionnaire)

Her attitude was mirrored in some of the tasks in her exercise book and in comments recorded in the field notes, when she answered questions on the nature of God or religion more generally and offered views (often reflecting her Muslim heritage), but then she was quick to distance herself from these views if asked to comment further.

9.3.2 Naturally thoughtful and articulate

Despite some reluctance from Ada to identify with the Muslim views and ideas she offered in lesson, from the very beginning of the research intervention, she showed herself to be thoughtful, articulate and willing to engage in discussion. This is demonstrated by the first questionnaire where she wrote in response to Q10 ('Does life have any meaning for you?')

> *Everyone who is born has their own talents and I do think that is true so everyone does have a meaning but the real question is 'why?' why does every person have a particular talent, why can't we do everything, why is some things impossible and other things not. So I don't quite know if we do actually have a meaning (Ada, First Questionnaire)*

Also, in Q12 ('Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?') to which she responded

> *Yes I definitely do think I have something special about me. Every person is equal and they are born for a reason and so many people feel down some days and happy in others but that is what makes us human. It's not just the blood cells in our body and the heart pumping blood in us it's the decisions we take to achieve something and so we all can achieve our dreams in our lives (Ada, First Questionnaire)*

Ada's ability to express and discuss existential questions is particularly evident in the transcripts of her two interviews. Her responses show the influence of her Muslim upbringing. For example, in her response to a debate on creation and the big bang between the students, when the idea of how a 'person' could create the universe was discussed, she commented that this sort of discussion is irreverent in a Muslim's view because

God is not a person and not something that can be made… it's something that's already there in the first place (Ada, First Interview)

In a discussion over the nature of God and the existence of evil, Ada suggested a possible response to this issue, a kind of theodicy. She stated

Unless He [God] wants us to see how good we have to become; so he will throw stuff at us to see how we react to it. Like some people are bad, they are thieves and stuff and they probably have a meaning to it, not just because they like it (Ada, First Interview)

She also responded to a point made by Laura, about the big band and God by stating

When Laura said about who made God well that might be in only one religion because in Muslims... God is not a person and it is not something that can be made... it's something that's already there in the first place and the big bang... how can... when the earth was created how can this just happen? From my perspective how can it just be created like that (Ada, Interview One)

Despite, Ada's reticence about her beliefs, in other ways she was very confident in what she thought, particularly when it came to the beliefs of other people. Ada was a thoughtful student but only really when it came to her own religious beliefs and she was often dismissive of views which contradicted her own.

9.3.3 A new-found confidence

Towards the end of the research intervention, Ada's attitude to her religious and cultural background began to shift in the way she talked about it, as she seemed much more assured of herself and her relationship with it. The shift is evident in the transcript of the second interview when she spoke with a confidence about her 'beliefs': such content is not always there in the first. When she responded to a question associated with purpose, destiny and meaning of life, she stated

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the meaning of life is not to be punished. I believe this as a Muslims I need to life a good life if I want to go to heaven

the meaning of life for me, like when I think about it, is to be a good Muslims and I am born to do this… to worship Allah the best I can (Ada, Second Interview)

In response to a question on the idea of God and science she said

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I believe in the Qur'an but that does not stop me believing in science. Allah for me is science... how do you think it all happened? Who caused the big bang? (Ada, Second Interview)

Ada was clear in her response to the statement that being brought up in a religion means she has been forced to believe, when she said that she did not mind being brought up as a Muslim as 'it is part of who I am'. She also says that, in her view, being brought up as a Muslim was the same as being brought up as an atheist, as both could be brainwashing. She stated to the interview group

You are the same as me. Like we were both brought up in our views… me to believe and you to not. What is the difference really?
(Ada, Second Interview)

Ada also responds that truth can be a matter of opinion so no one has the right to say you can or cannot believe in something, arguing

It is an ultimate question because, no one knows what, well what you believe if you think that is true and that is your opinion, so no one actually knows what is actually true it's just their opinion of what is true (Ada, Second Interview)

Her confidence is also evidenced in her latter written assessment on the existence of God when she concluded

I think that I am an agnostic because there is enough evidence to support either situations. I think that there are many religions across the globe but I also think that life has many worse qualities that God may not exist. But who am I to decide this? (Ada, Written Assessment Work)

9.3.4 Learning Habits

Ada's view of herself as a learner from the outset was quite positive, and she commented in her first learning review that 'I am a good learner' and 'I always try to complete my work well'. However, she was also very honest and admitted to not always doing what she should. As such, a recurring theme seen in her Learning Habits Diary is an issue with focus, listening and managing distractions. Her attitude was also noted in the field notes where I commented on the ability of Ada to contribute interesting points to the discussions while simultaneously

carrying on a conversation about something completely different with those around her (16/11/16). The general focus on managing distractions and the way in which learning habits are interconnected is also demonstrated by Ada's Learning Habits Diary when she listed several success criteria for reasoning, including that she needed to 'stop and think more carefully', 'to make links', and 'to listen and learn from others'. She also commented in her lesson feedback that she had tried 'connecting with other people's opinions' (12/12/16).

Ada commented in the second interview that the act of filling out the Learning Habits Diary, in which she reflected on how well she was developing her learning habits, had helped her to widen her viewpoint, encouraged her to think more deeply, and to challenge the assumption that she was always right. She commented

I think that for me where it has widened is that the ultimate questions - I have thought more deeply about them. Like is there life after death and all thoughts. I think they really they show a bigger viewpoint and makes you see more deeply into it (Ada, Interview Two)

As part of the second interview, Ada is also asked if any of the learning habits helped the students in lessons and, as with Stephen, empathy is one of the habits picked by Ada which she claims had an impact on her:

'it puts us in someone else's shoes, it makes us see from their perspective of what they see. Like you can't always stick to your opinion and side. You have to understand other people's point of views (Ada, Interview Two)

She also points out that, at the beginning of the year, she assumed she was right in her views and did not see why others might view things differently to her, writing

At the start I would just believe in my religion and think oh no everyone else is all wrong and my aspect is correct. Then throughout the year I have realised that if you understand from someone else and forget about your opinion, just for a while, you will understand that you weren't right and other people can have opinions too (Ada, Interview Two)

9.3.5 Summary

Unlike Stephen, Ada demonstrated ability according to many of the basic and some of the more advanced markers of development in existential thinking (see section 5.4.2): she showed from the beginning an interest in the topics we were covering, an ability to ask and respond to existential questions, and it was also evident that she had some personal investment in these questions and answers. Her interest could be explained by her Muslim upbringing, as she was dealing with some deep existential questions of her own concerning her faith background and her place within it.

During the intervention, and in the second interview particularly, Ada became more confident in who she was, and in her relationship with her cultural beliefs and background, by learning that it was okay to question what one has been taught. She showed development according to the advanced markers of development in existential thinking by the realisation that there are many ways in which existential questions can be answered. She also later voiced the opinion that she no longer thought she was right all of the time. This was not how she came across in the earlier stages of the intervention, but this evidence at the later stage of the intervention is perhaps a reflection of her developing maturity.

There are many possible factors which could explain Ada's development in confidence - her developing maturity being one of them. However, one significant factor could also be that she was subject to the building of a metacognitive learning environment in the classroom, which encouraged the students to be more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as learners, to manage their distractions better, listen better and, particularly for her, to understand that not everyone sees the world in the same way. From the beginning, she was honest about herself as a learner, and commented several times in her learning diary on her 'issues' with managing her distractions and ability to listen. Interestingly, as with Stephen, empathy was specifically mentioned as a learning habit, the discussion and practice of which helped Ada to see that there are different ways of thinking and believing. Although not mentioned specifically, the idea of revising, or changing your views, is also evidenced here in her words about 'widening her views' and 'understanding that you weren't right'. Her comments show that not only are learning habits interconnected, but that the ability to think about and answer existential questions can be improved through the development of learning habits which encourage students to pay more attention to the views of others, and to your own response to the views.

9.4 Martha – The searcher for meaning

Martha is from a middle socioeconomic background and, based on her KS2 results, she is expected to achieve the middle band grades at GCSE (4-6). She is a popular student with a firm group of friends; however, she is reserved in lessons and rarely contributes to discussions. Despite her reticence, her written work and answer to the two questionnaires reveal a curious mind interested in existential questions.

Martha did not consent to be interviewed so I was unable to question her about her answers in the questionnaires, or her classwork and learning diary entries. The following section presents a cross-section of data collected (October 2016-July 2017).

9.4.1 Unsure but curious

In the first questionnaire Martha identified herself as being an atheist, but when asked in Q7 whether she believed in God or not, she chose the response 'I have no opinion on this issue'. Her explanation for this view was that she had no religion and 'to me God is just one of them things I can't be sure if God is an actual person'. It is not clear whether Martha was referring to a Jesus-type figure with this comment, but she made it clear she had no firm religious beliefs. She also asserted her lack of religion in Q11 ('Do you think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong)?') to which she responded

> *I am unsure because I have no religion and have no opinion on god and about hell and heaven , although in life you should be punished for doing wrong (Martha, Questionnaire One)*

Despite having no clear religious views, Martha demonstrated some of the basic markers for development in existential thinking from the outset: she showed an interest in existential questions, responding to Q9 in the first questionnaire ('What do you think will happen to you when you die?')

> *I am not sure what will happen to me when I die but I do wish to start again, a new life (Martha, Questionnaire One)*

She also showed the ability to ask and answer questions of meaning: for example, in her classwork in response to the task on religious answers to ultimate questions ('Why do people do bad things?') she wrote

> *I think Christianity is interesting as they believe 'each human is born with a tendency towards evil' … this makes me think that everyone could be evil and everyone has the chance to do bad things (Martha, Exercise Book)*

9.4.2 Personal search for God

Martha was a quiet student who very rarely contributed to lessons verbally; but her written work evidences a person searching for meaning, and this is particularly clear in her work on God in which several of the basic markers of development in existential thinking are demonstrated. Firstly, despite her comment in the first questionnaire that she 'has no opinion about god', her interest in the question of God's existence can be seen in her first assessed pieces of work which involved evaluating the claim that 'Non-religious people are not interested in ultimate questions?' to which she responded

> *I am not religious, but I am interested in ultimate questions … I have always wanted to know who created life?, Why are we living?*
> *(Martha, Assessment Work)*

She demonstrated here the ability to ask questions of meaning, and the fact that she was prepared to say what she did and did not believe about God. Martha's questioning and changing attitude to the existence of God can be seen in her exercise book later in the curriculum intervention when answering the question 'What do you believe about God?':

I believe I am an agnostic, as I am not sure whether I believe in god…. but as others express their views, I think about my viewpoint, and agree sometimes and not at other times.

During the topics I have been considering my beliefs about God to be changed, as many people have points and view towards God, these points question my views (Martha, Exercise Book)

Martha's response evidences a developing ability according to the more advanced markers of existential thinking, as she showed an appreciation of the views of others and more of an openness to listen to others and re-evaluate her own views. Martha's attitude, particularly to the existence of God, had changed: in her first questionnaire, her response to Q3 ('Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews?') is atheist; however, this changes to 'other' in the second questionnaire. This change is also reflected in her answer to Q7 ('Do you believe in God?') where, in the first questionnaire, she wrote she had no opinion on the issue but in the second she wrote

There is lots of views for both ways so I'm still trying to figure out whether I believe or not (Martha, Questionnaire Two)

9.4.3 More complexity

Initially, despite her interest in essential questions and issues, Martha's responses to such questions lacked detail, but they improved over the intervention. In the second questionnaire, and some of her later written work, she gradually included more detail, evidence of personal introspection and - in places - a willingness to re-evaluate her own views (see 6.3.1.2). For example, her response to Q15 ('Do you think you are in control of your life?') is 'Unsure' in the first questionnaire because she wrote 'You may make choices but other people can change it'

(Martha, Questionnaire One); however, the response to the same question in the second questionnaire is a definitive 'Yes' because

> *you're in control with how well you want to do, and if you do not make that decision yourself you are to blame so you're in control how you want to do! (Martha, Questionnaire Two)*

In a later unit of work on the life of the Buddha Martha showed knowledge of relevant Buddhist teachings and also demonstrated some personal reflection on the Buddhists' understanding of happiness. The students were asked to respond to a problem page as if they are Buddha, and Martha replied to the problem by writing

> *Firstly, I would like to say that I'm sorry for your loss and you just need to try and stay positive. Suffering is included in everyone's life and what causes these problems is this craving, in your case, you crave your pet. You need to live the middle way to stop this craving, then you will no longer suffer. As difficult as it may be to let something go, this is your only chance to move on and stop this suffering. Everyone has to go through problems and suffering, you're not alone! (Martha, Exercise Book)*

In the end of unit assessment task entitled 'Can Buddha's teachings make us happy?', which was carried out later in the intervention, Martha also wrote

> *Buddha has also shown us the three poisons … the pig represents ignorance, the snake represents hatred and the rooster represent hatred. Everyone has at least one of these characteristics and Buddha has tried to cure these poisons. Think about what characteristics you have, and this can eventually link back to happiness (Martha, Assessment Task)*

A change in response, more detail in her response and evidence of the influence of what she has been taught in the classroom is evident in the difference of her responses to Q11('Do you think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong)?'). In the first questionnaire she wrote

> *I am unsure because I have no religion and have no opinion on god and about hell and heaven, although in life you should be punished for doing wrong but be given another chance. Martha, Questionnaire One*

In her second questionnaire answer to this question, she shows a change in belief from 'I have religion and have no opinion on god' to one clearly influenced by the teachings of Buddha which comments on personal choice and responsibility. Martha writes

> *I have a Buddha feature in me, I believe in karma and those who do wrong or bad will be punished as to what they deserve! I believe that everyone gets to choose their path of their life and see where it takes them then they get a fortunate or an unfortunate turn in their life as to what path they took (Martha, Questionnaire Two)*

Martha's continued development of her ability to express her ideas and think existential questions can be seen in her response to a task set in the last week of the school year, as a result of a mini unit of work using P4C in which she wrote her own response to the question 'Is there just this?':

> *If we live here as humans not knowing for sure how or why we are here, then we cannot question the view that there could possibly be another planet with living things, living their lives normally. Maybe us as humans have not searched as far as we really think (Martha, Exercise Book)*

9.4.4 Learning Habits

Martha was clear in her first learning review that she was good at managing her distractions and not disrupting other people; however, she also admitted at this stage that she was not so good at identifying her own strengths and weaknesses. Her lack of confidence in herself and her abilities resonated with her general demeanour in lessons, as she very rarely contributed, and this was something she commented on herself in her learning diary later in the first term writing 'I need to actually contribute' (12/12/16), and later, 'I could ask questions and not be afraid to ask them' (29/03/17). Her comments about perseverance also show her lack of confidence when she recorded becoming annoyed with herself and giving up if something is difficult (31/03/17). Later in the curriculum intervention, Martha wrote in her second formal Learning Review that 'In RE the learning habits have helped me to persevere and not to give up, as my reasoning has improved my work'.

Martha made an interesting point in her response to Q16 of the second questionnaire ('Which learning habits do you think you have developed the most this year?'), as she selected a number of habits (nearly all of them) and explained this in her response to Q17

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they all link together so if you improve one that will make big differences with them all (Martha, Questionnaire Two)

Her observation is backed up by some entries to her learning diary: when looking at reasoning she wrote that to do this well you must listen (12/12/16), learn from others (23/01/17), to notice you need to manage your distractions (01/03/17) and ask questions (29/03/17). To

persevere she noted that you need to keep focused, notice details (16/05/17), work with others when needed (31/03/17); to empathise you need to listen to the views of others and think about those views (09/01/17). Her response to question Q18 (‘How far would you agree that exploring the different learning habits in RE has helped you to become a better RE student?’) is ‘strongly agree’, and in Q19 she gave her reason for this

> *because it has helped me develop all these skills so it has made me more confident and better at all these topics in RE (Martha, Questionnaire Two)*

Another interesting point are the targets and comments made by Martha early in her learning diary. These show her thinking through her reasons (12.12.16) and considering her viewpoints (23/01/17). Her attention on her own views is joined by a focus on the views of others with which she seemed to find difficult to engage at times; for example, she commented in her learning diary that she did listen in lesson and tried to be curious about the views of others but that this was something she needed to improve further (06/12/16). She could listen or focus on the views of others but she was aware that she did not always then go on to ‘think’ about these views (09/01/17). She sustained the same focus in her Second Learning Review. Martha wrote

> *I’m trying to take in and understand others reasons … I am trying to use others reasons to help mine (Martha, Second Learning Review)*

9.4.5 Summary

Like Stephen, and similar to Ada?, Martha already showed many of the basic markers of existential thinking at the beginning of the curriculum intervention: she showed interest in

existential questions, could ask and answer questions of meaning, and was clear what she thought she did or did not believe. Later in the intervention she began to show more of the advanced markers for development in existential thinking, for example, she came to demonstrate more of a personal investment in these questions, an understanding that she needed to do more than just listen to the views of others and to think about them, and an openness to a re-evaluation of her views.

Whether Martha already possessed these qualities is unclear; however, clearly she underwent a change in view about the existence of God. The quality of Martha's written work also improved, becoming more detailed, introspective and confident. She also made it clear that she believed the explicit teaching of the learning habits made her a better RE student, commenting that they have helped her to become more confident, to take notice, and think more carefully about her own views and those of others.

Despite choosing most of the habits in the second questionnaire, the key ones for Martha as evidenced in her learning diary, were taking notice, reasoning and perseverance. Connected with this, she also showed an awareness of the importance of empathy and revising, as even though she did not talk about the terms empathy or revising specifically, she was clear that she needed to appreciate what others have to say, and in several places in her learning diary she commented on her struggle. In terms of revising, she also became more open to the views of others, particularly those on God, and willing to revaluate her own ideas.

9.5 Sonia –The devoted believer

Sonia was a hardworking student who, based on her KS2 results, was expected to achieve the higher grades at GCSE (7-9). She was from a comfortable middle class background where all members of her family attended Church every Sunday. She was popular in the class and was firm friends with a small group of girls from her primary school. Sonia did not contribute to discussions in lessons very regularly but when she did contribute it was clear she did so as a committed Christian.

Sonia did not agree to be interviewed so I was not able scrutinise further any of her responses in the questionnaires or her classwork and learning journal sections. In the accompanying segment I present a cross-section of information gathered (October 2016-July 2017).

9.5.1 Christian Background

In the first questionnaire Sonia was clear about her Christian beliefs through her response to a number of questions including Q7 ('Do you believe in God?') where she stated

I believe in God as I'm Christian; I believe in Jesus. Also I have been brought up in a religious family (Sonia, Questionnaire One)

This was also demonstrated in her answer to Q11 (Do you think we will be punished for our sins [things we do wrong]?) where she wrote

> *Well as I'm a Christian I believe I will be punished Well as I'm a Christian I believe I will be punished, but I can as a Christian pray and say sorry for all the bad thing say I've done. (Sonia, Questionnaire One)*

Sonia's Christian faith is further confirmed in her exercise book when, as part of a speech on the existence of God, she wrote

> *I would describe myself as a theist as I believe in God. I believe that he will guide me through troubling times. I believe that he created the universe and me… I can see why some people would disagree with me as Science cannot prove it. You just have to trust it (Sonia, Exercise Book)*

In one of the rare occasions Sonia contribute to class discussions my field notes recorded that she told the class that she believed in God as she was a Christian (14/02/17). Her conviction about God's existence does not change through the evidence and in the second questionnaire where to Q7 ('Do you believe in God?') she responded

> *I have been brought up in a Christian family and have just built up my faith in God throughout my life (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)*

Also, in response to Q10 ('Does life have any meaning for you?') she writes

> *Although maybe sometimes everything doesn't go to plan I think that life does have a meaning. I believe I am here to spread the word of God with other people so they can go to heaven (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)*

Sonia's questionnaires and written output show her knowledge and understanding of her faith, not only in belief in Jesus and God, but more specifically about the idea of God as creator and judge, as well as in the beliefs in heaven, forgiveness and prayer. She also showed some understanding that her faith affected her life when in response to Q15 ('Do you think you are in control of your life?') she wrote

I think yes because you're in control of what you do to your life and body. God is there to tell you but you have to do it yourself (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)

Leading me to a similar conclusion, in Q10 in the first questionnaire ('Does life have any meaning for you?') she responded

Life is the most amazing thing in the world. But you have to look after that one and only life you have, as I believe I will never live again on earth but I will in heaven (Sonia, Questionnaire One)

This knowledge and understanding of her faith is evidenced well in the 'Special Place' task in which she portrayed a church as a place where

Candles are set out to say that God is the light of the world. Bibles are stacked, on top of the other. 'Life, Love and Worship' is written on the wall and also the quotation 'For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord' – Jeremiah 29:11 (Sonia, Exercise Book)

9.5.2 Attitude to other faiths

Despite her Christian beliefs, Sonia's response to Q3 ('Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews?') in the first questionnaire was unexpected as she wrote that she identified not only with Christianity but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. To begin with I assumed she had not understood the question, however, it became clear that she had interpreted 'identify' as 'recognising' and being 'interested' in all of these faiths. This interest in other faiths was not because she was dissatisfied with her own, but that she felt it was important to know about different religions. This conclusion of mine is further backed up by her response in the first questionnaire to Q6 ('Have you enjoyed RE so far?) where she wrote

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I quite like learning about RE because I like learning all the different religions as I find it interesting, also I think it is important (Sonia, Questionnaire One)

Similarly, in the second questionnaire she had responded

I like learning about other people's opinions on religion and I like learning about the general subject (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)

Sonia's view that it was important to learn about other faiths can also be seen in her exercise book where she wrote

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I think that we should respect other peoples beliefs as we are all different and believe in different things. Jews, Christians, Muslims, for example, all believe in different things and we should respect that. Also if someone believes that after they die they will live again, even if you don't you can still respect it (Sonia, Exercise Book)

Also, in response to the assessment question on ultimate Questions she stated

> *that you do not have to be religious or non-religious to be interested in ultimate questions. Some questions are religious and some are not (Sonia, Assessment Task)*

Despite Sonia's statements that learning about other religions was important, this was not always evident in her classwork, where on several occasions she had the opportunity to learn more about another religious perspective, but chose not to. An example of this was in an early activity on Christian, Sikh and Islamic responses to the problem of evil, when she chose to stick with Christianity rather than look at one of the other religious responses. However, later in the intervention in the unit on Buddha, Sonia did engage more with specific views of another religion in her written work. In the assessment task ('Can the teachings of Buddha make you happy?') she wrote about how encountering the Four Noble Truths had helped her to be happier in life. In the same assessment she also stated that the Five precepts had encouraged her to reflect on her lifestyle, and the concept of the middle way had taught her to be more aware of what she wants as opposed to what she actually needs. In the conclusion to her assessment on happiness, she noted

> *I have really enjoyed this subject. It has taught me so many new things and I'm glad I listened… I think really anyone can follow Buddha even if they are not religious (Sonia, Assessment Task)*

9.5.3 Existential Thinking

Due to Sonia's religious faith and background she showed from the start a proficiency in many of the basic and more advanced markers for existential thinking: she demonstrated an interest

in existential questions (especially those of a religious nature), an appreciation of the importance of learning about the views of others, and an understanding of how she could ask and answer questions of meaning. For example, in her answer to Q14 in the first and second questionnaires (‘Is being happy important to you?) she wrote

Being happy is important to me but also being sad is important too. Say maybe you don't get everything you want and you may be sad. Sometimes being sad is good for you, so you may understand the difference between wants and what you need (Sonia, Questionnaire One)

I put important and not very important because sometimes it is good to be sad because otherwise you can act the wrong way if something doesn't go to plan. NO ONE is perfect accept God, and he wants to teach us to feel different emotions (Sonia, Questionnaire Two)

On the one hand, Sophie demonstrated little marked change in the quality of her existential thinking over the curriculum intervention, as she was already fairly competent, especially with regard to many of the early markers: from the beginning she showed she could look beyond knowledge to the issues of value and meaning with much of what she wrote containing a personal angle. She also expressed an interest in learning about the views of others, although to begin with this interest was not followed up with any more extended investigation into the views of other religions, of which there were several opportunities. However, this did change in the Buddha and happiness unit of work.

Unlike Ada, Martha or Stephen there was no obvious personal struggle about what she believed, nor was there much involvement in critical debate. This is reflected, for example, in

the assessment speech she produced on the question of God's existence, when she explained at length why she believes and was quick to dismiss any issues raised. Where the evidence does seem to point to a change in existential thinking is in the later unit on Buddha and happiness, where she expressed how some of the Buddhist teachings on, for example, the middle way and the Five precepts had enriched her views. Another interesting change can be seen in Sonia's answers to Q4 (Do you talk about religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home?) to which she answered 'sometimes' in the first questionnaire which she then changed to 'regularly' in the second. This change may not signify anything, but assuming she may be now instigating discussion at home it could have been an indication of her increased confidence to talk about religious and moral questions.

9.5.4 Learning Habits

In her first learning review and, in several places in her learning diary, Sonia wrote honestly about her abilities commenting that she was good at working with others and at asking for help when needed, and that she needed to focus on contributing to class discussions as she was afraid of getting her answers wrong. In her second learning review (completed towards the end of curriculum intervention) she was more detailed about her performance over the year, when she wrote

> *In RE the learning habits have helped me to concentrate and to be determined to know more than I did when I started. I have learnt how to manage distractions and to notice, observe, pay attention and listen during lessons. I need to contribute more and not be scared to get the answer wrong. I need to be willing to make mistakes and learn from them (Sonia, Second Learning Review)*

Sonia's second learning review gives a good overview of many of the learning habits covered in the curriculum intervention, and also highlights those habits which stand out the most in her Learning Diary, particularly that of managing distractions, noticing and perseverance. In her Learning Diary, Sonia had bemoaned her lack of confidence and difficulties in contributing to discussions, and improving her confidence was regularly one of her targets (12/12/16, 31/03/17).

Sonia's confidence did improve over the curriculum intervention, and this could be seen when she volunteered to take part in a hot-seating activity on the existence of God, on which she commented (recorded in field notes) 'I would not have done this back in September'. Also further to her written work on the teachings of Buddha, as commented upon in the field notes, she contributed more to class discussions, notably in a debate on needs, wants and materialism (16/05/17). Evidence of her developing confidence is also accompanied by indications of an appreciation that many of the learning habits are interlinked and function to support each other. For example, when she wrote about the importance of persevering in her learning diary, she also commented that to do this well she needed to listen more carefully and ensure she worked with others and not be afraid to ask for help if needed (09/01/17). Sonia's response to Q18 ('How far would you agree that exploring the different learning habits in RE has helped you to become a better RE student?') was that overall the learning habits had helped her 'very much' and in Q19 in explanation she wrote

> *If I didn't persevere I wouldn't learn anything, if I didn't notice I still wouldn't learn anything and that is what school is about, to learn and achieve (Sonia, Questionnaire Two).*

Sonia's answer to Q16 (Which learning habits do you think you have developed the most this year?) of the second questionnaire, does not mention Empathy; however, she chose making links and in her learning diary she was also clear that making links had had an impact on her attitude to the views of others, when she wrote 'I need to link more to the ideas of others and try to understand them' (09/01/16).

9.5.5 Summary

As a consequence of Sonia's religious background she was naturally curious about existential questions. She showed many of the basic, and some of the more advanced markers for development in existential thinking from the outset. To begin with, the explicit teaching of learning habits alongside the lesson content did not seem to have much of an impact on her development in existential thinking.

Sonia's lack of confidence seemed to affect her ability to engage more with the views of others through a fear of 'getting it wrong' (Learning Diary, 29/03/17). On the one hand, she professed to be interested in the views of others and that she has respect for all faiths, but on the other hand, when given the option to explore religious teachings different from her own, she opted for the Christian option as something she knows. There is also very little evidence of her engaging in critical debate in relation to any teachings which could undermine her faith perspective.

As with Stephen, Ada and Martha, what does affect Sonia was the constant reference in lessons to ‘having a go’ and not being afraid of getting things wrong – Sonia was unconfident in herself as a learner but gradually this improved, and came to fruition when she spoke out more in lesson, and when she wrote enthusiastically about Buddha’s teachings on happiness. Here, Sonia’s work evidences one of the more advanced markers of existential thinking, that of being able to enrich her own view with that from another. However, what is interesting to note is that these references to the middle way and the five precepts are connected to lifestyle and morality which do not challenge her faith, but can easily sit alongside it. This picture may have been very different if the topic or religion had been different.

9.6 Leo - The uninterested atheist

According to his KS2 results Leo was expected to achieved strong passes at GCSE (5-6). From a comfortable socio-economic background, he was a popular student within the class and always volunteered to carry out administrative tasks for his teachers. He was chatty and able to contribute to lessons, but despite this his attitude to RE was generally one of polite uninterest.

Leo did not consent to be interviewed, so I was unable to question him about any of his response to the questionnaires. The following section presents a cross-section of data collected (October 2016-July 2017).

9.6.1 Religion is not part of my life

In Q3 (Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews?), Q4 (Do you talk about religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home?) and Q7 (Do you believe in God?) of both questionnaires, Leo made it clear that he was an atheist and this was the way he had been brought up. In Q6 (Have you enjoyed RE so far?) he stated he did not really like RE, as religion was not part of his life, and he apologised for not understanding RE as a subject. Leo's atheistic beliefs are evidenced in his exercise book work when, in a task on the belief in God, he wrote

I would describe myself as an Atheist because I haven't been brought up around religion and I don't belong to a religion and I don't believe in god that makes me an Atheist (Leo, Exercise Book).

9.6.2 Existential Thinking

Leo's responses in the questionnaires and his written work were generally concise, with little detail or explanation. For example, to Q10 (Does life have any meaning for you?) in both questionnaires he responded

It is very valuable (Leo, Questionnaire One)

because life is good and I feel proud to be alive (Leo, Questionnaire Two)

His response to Q13 (Is it important to you to be a good person?) was similarly terse

I feel been a good person will make me feel good (Leo, Questionnaire One)

I want to be remembered for good things when I die (Leo, Questionnaire Two)

Also, in answer to Q15 (Do you think you are in control of your life?), his responses in both questionnaires were

I feel independent (Leo, Questionnaire One)

I believe in what I want to do and don't let anyone decide for me (Leo, Questionnaire Two)

There are some differences evidenced in responses between questionnaire one and two in terms of Leo's understanding of what existential questions are, and what sort of answers they are asking for. For example, in Q9 (What do you think will happen to you when you die?) in the first questionnaire, he wrote factually

I will cremated and spread in my favourite place St. Ives in Cornwall (Leo, Questionnaire One)

Whereas, in the second questionnaire, his response reflects an understanding that the question asks for his views on the afterlife

I will go to sleep because I'm dead and that's a sleep you can't awake from in my opinion (Leo, Questionnaire Two)

In his written work, Leo showed an ability to be thoughtful and write in more detail, for instance in response to a question on 'How did the world begin?' where he wrote

My thoughts on this is that another rocky planet was destroyed by a meteor and the rocks re-linked and fixed back together which made the

earth and the water and plants mysteriously grew to make life
(Leo, Exercise Book)

However, despite the fact this question was discussed from scientific, religious and philosophical perspectives, and the students were asked to write about it from another angle, he did not do this. I recorded in the field notes that a few students, not just Leo, did not engage with any views apart from their own.

It was not until in the unit on the existence of God that Leo included the views of someone who disagrees with him. He wrote that one of the reasons people do not believe in God is because of the existence of evil and suffering: 'Why do bad things happen to good people?'. However, he also acknowledged that some people might disagree with his view that there is no God, as there is also no proof that God does not exist. This opinion is also reflected in Q8 (If there is a God, what is God like?) in the second questionnaire, when he responded

if there is a god I think he would save people from illness
(Leo, Questionnaire Two)

Leo's response is a development from the first questionnaire, where he did not give any particular reasons why he did not believe in God, beyond not being brought up that way.

Unlike Ada, Stephen, Martha and Sonia, the unit of work on the Buddha did not have much of an effect on Leo. In the existence of God topic he showed some improvement in the detail of

his work, and in some of the evidence, the basic markers of existential thinking (showing an interest in the big questions of life, being able to ask and answer questions of meaning, and being able to make links between what he does and does not believe) can be seen. However, when it came to the unit on Buddha, Leo seemed to regress in both the detail of his work and his engagement with the views presented. In his Buddhism assessment task on happiness he wrote the following comment but adds no explanation

the middle way is a good teaching because we have to choose what actions and attitudes make us happy (Leo, Assessment Task)

Despite his comment here, in the last task of the year Leo wrote the following response to the question in a P4C task -'Is this all a dream?', which showed he was more than capable of contributing more:

Many people could say it's all a dream, that's their opinion. In my opinion it's not a dream because if it was a dream why are we all seeing the same as everyone else? Secondly, if it's a dream why do people suffer because dreams should be nice that means some people are having a nightmare. Many people could argue about my opinion because maybe when we die is when we wake up (Leo, Exercise Book)

9.6.3 Learning Habits

Leo's inconsistent development in his existential thinking corresponds to a similar pattern in his learning habits, and one of the main reasons for this was a lack of self-discipline in the classroom to avoid getting distracted. This was an issue for several students, of whom Leo was one.

In his first learning review he wrote that he was not confident, found it difficult to consider the views of others, but that he could manage his distractions. However, from observation of the class, as recorded in the field notes, Leo was in fact very chatty and not as good at managing distractions as he claimed. He went on to acknowledge this in the second learning review in which he wrote 'at the start of the year I was quite chatty', and in his Learning Diary, he made several references to focus and managing distractions, for example, 'I must not be so chatty' and 'I need to give 100% focus' (21/03/17, 29/03/17, 31/03/17).

Leo showed an understanding that success in many of the learning habits, if not all, hinges on the basic abilities of being able to manage distractions, listen and focus. In his learning diary, he listed managing distractions as part of the success criteria for achievement in other learning habits; he observed that being able to listen and manage distractions are vital supports for development in the perseverance learning habits.

However, the reality is that Leo does not always manage his distractions well, and this has a knock-on effect on the development of his other learning habits, and the quality of his written work. He admitted to not always getting involved in lessons in his learning diary (12/12/16) and this is also reflected in the many gaps in his learning diary.

9.6.4 Summary

Leo was very inconsistent in his development of both the learning habits and existential thinking. He showed development in the markers for existential thinking in the unit of work on

God and this also coincided with a concerted effort from Leo to manage his distractions, but the evidence is that his development was sporadic and not sustained. Maybe a better description of Leo would be 'lack of focus' and not 'uninterested'; however, his atheistic views do not change, and apart from one or two comments about the reasons why someone would believe in God, he does not engage fully with much of the religious content or the views of other people. With the occasional exceptions I have mentioned, his work was generally not very detailed, and he admitted in the second questionnaire that he had not enjoyed RE 'because I'm not religious, it doesn't affect me, sorry but I don't really understand RE'. What he meant by 'understand' is unclear; it could have meant he did not understand why RE is a lesson to study at school or perhaps that he found the content difficult; either way, the subject did little for him.

9.7 Concluding reflection

The five case studies demonstrate that the students reacted to the teaching of the learning habits, alongside the existential classroom materials, in a variety of ways. The data generated by the case studies, as seen in chapter 6, is representative of the class as a whole and goes some way to answering the second subsidiary research questions: 1) 'Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?'.

It is acknowledged that the content taught to the students would also have played a role in the development of existential thinking, as many of the students were interested in the topics taught. However, the role the learning habits played was to develop the students' ability to

focus more on what they were learning, to listen, question and try to step into someone else's shoes. Learning habits such as noticing and making links also encouraged the students to see beyond their own spheres of reference, to take the views of others seriously and understand that they have no monopoly on truth.

The case studies showed that some habits did play a greater role than others in the supporting the development of existential thinking as presented by the markers of development in existential thinking. They also showed, as pointed out by Martha, Sonia and Ada, that many of the other habits played a supporting role in their development. Those habits which seemed to play this greater role are those of empathy, metacognition, revising, making links and noticing.

Metacognition (meta-learning) was not discussed formally until later in the curriculum intervention, but the idea of a metacognitive learning environment was promoted in principle from the very beginning of the curriculum intervention. Self-reflection, a key component of such an environment, was a constituent part of all lessons: for example, when the students filled in their learning diaries, contributed to class discussions or completed questions and written reflection tasks in their books, the importance of self-reflection was stressed. Being part of a metacognitive learning environment did have an impact in most of the case studies, and it was the emphases on focus, self-confidence and self-reflection that encouraged the students not just to passively think about what was presented to them, but also to apply what they were learning to themselves and challenge their own thought patterns. This development may have occurred naturally for some of the students, but for many, based on the comments

they make in their learning diaries and reviews, the act of reflection was facilitated more through the emphasis on developing the learning habits, and on setting targets to do this. This can be seen, for example, in Stephen's case study where he wrote about 'wanting to be more open to the views of others', Ada when she said she needed to 'stop and think more carefully', and Martha when she wrote that she tried to be curious about the views of others but that this was something she needed to work on. Here, the revising learning habit can also be perceived, when some of the students wrote about learning or being open to the views of others, and where students, such as Stephen, Ada and Martha, evidenced a willingness to change, modify or widen their views. Leo, on the other hand, did not show much interest in the views of others and certainly was not open to change like some of the others. This may in part have been down to his atheistic views but it could also be explained by his issues with listening and managing his distractions, learning habits which are so important for the success of many of the others.

The Empathy learning habit was also one which seemed to play a role in supporting the development of existential thinking: both Stephen and Ada referred to it as encouraging them, in the first instance, to see that listening to the views of others was worth their time. It is unclear if either of these students did develop empathy, but the exploration of it, as one of the learning habits, did have an impact on how they viewed others and ultimately their ability to engage with existential questions at a deeper level. Empathy seemed to have less of an impact on Sonia as she displayed from the very beginning an appreciation that other people may think

differently to her, but in practice she was only willing to engage with the views of others which contracted hers, as an impersonal academic exercise.

Chapter 10

DISCUSSION

10.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined five case studies all of whom responded to the curriculum intervention in differing ways and looked the ways in which they did and did not show development in the markers for existential thinking (figure 9). In this chapter I will demonstrate, that some learning habits did seem to play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE, particularly that of empathy, metacognition and revising. I will show that some groups of students did respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking and explore why some were reticent to engage in the lessons, what the source of this resistance was, and how it was overcome. Lastly, I will show that despite other variables, how my intervention and data demonstrate that it is plausible student development in existential thinking in RE can be supported using the building learning power framework.

In the literature review (throughout chapters 3 and 4) I explained why I have adopted the term 'existential thinking' in this context, as it was the least contentious term to describe the content of the personal development aim of RE: the material which RE as personal development is trying to engage with and the results which RE as personal development is aiming to achieve in the classroom. Existential thinking was described in chapter 4 as a subjective process in which the students form relationships with and create personal meaning

with existential concepts such as ‘How can we be happy?’, ‘Does God exist?’ and ‘What happens when you die?’. There is an acknowledgement that these concepts are part of the belief systems of world views and religions; however, in the secular RE classroom, there is no expectation for the students to adopt any of them. That is, there is no universal meaning of life, religious or otherwise, which is assumed or required. What is important is that the students are given the space in the classroom for them both to encounter differing frameworks of meaning which may contradict what they hold to be true and also to reflect on their own views and those of others (see Nobandegani *et al*. 2015, Allan and Shearer 2012., Webster 2004).

All units of work taught as part of the RE curriculum (apart from some elements of the first Introductory material taught early in the year) tried to encourage existential thinking, and some students engaged in this from the very beginning. During my intervention, it was the God and happiness modules in which student engagement with existential thinking was at its best, as students not only engaged in an academic manner with the ideas but also formed relationships with the existential questions being asked - by sharing and forming their own views and by engaging with those of other people.

10.2 Do some groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?

The case studies (chapter 9) show that different groups of student do respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking. For a minority of students there was little response to any attempt to develop their existential thinking. Some students did not engage

with the lesson, were passive and produced work which lack thought and detail. Leo, for example, did engage a little bit but he does not make any progress, even stating in his learning diary that RE was not his interest.

For most of the class the creation of a 'can do' classroom environment through reference to the managing distractions, listening and perseverance learning habits resulted in improved student confidence, to explore the religious materials presented to them and also to communicate in writing or in contributions to the lessons their personal thoughts and feelings on what they were learning. This improved confidence also seemed to give some students the permission to engage in the questions discussed and show more interest in the big question discussed. This can be seen in some of the responses to Q16 of the second questionnaire ('Which learning habits do you think you have developed the most this year?') where some students reference the learning habits in terms of their enjoyment, motivation and confidence in the subject (Martha, Owen). This can also be seen in some of the contributions to the learning diaries, for example, where Eva wrote, 'The learning habits have helped me by giving me more confidence to say my ideas'. Anna too makes reference in her second learning review that the learning habits had helped her share her opinions with the class.

The engagement with the existential questions for many of the students remained at the level of being able to ask and answer questions of meaning, and make links between what they do, or do not believe, and the ideas studied. This also included being able to engage in a critical

debate at some level. However, there was not always personal or emotional interest in what they were studying.

For some the self-reflection was deeper and emotional, but it did not always consist of much interest in the views of others. Sonia (see case study) was a case in point, coming from a Christian background, she was able to discuss existential questions from her own standpoint, but seemed less interested or able to do from another perspective. However, she did indicate in her second questionnaire that religions and existential questions are now discussed at home which hints a possible change in attitude. Offa is another student, also from a Christian background, he sat back and contributed comparatively little to class debates. However, he is clear in his written activities that he is a Christian, but shows little interest or engagement with views different to his own.

However, some students were more emotionally invested with the existential questions where the student not only reflected on their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs but also that of the religions and worldviews studied. Some of those who showed themselves to be adept at this sort of enquiry were visibly so from the beginning of the research intervention: Ada for example (see case study), was one of the students interviewed and she showed a good grasp and interest in existential questions. What she did develop, however, as seen in the second interview was more of a confidence in herself and in her cultural beliefs and background. Martha in contrast is an example of a student who seems to undergo an existential struggle as evidenced in what she writes and speaks about. In the first questionnaire she writes about not

having a religion and in the second questionnaire she is much more open about her personal struggle with whether she believes God exists or not. Martha's comments appear all the way through the findings chapter which also demonstrates her interest and developing ability to engage with existential questions. Her development seems to indicate some form of personal re-evaluation as a result of what she have studied. She is also clear that the learning of certain learning habits had helped her become a better RE student. Other examples of students who had a change in attitude towards the existence of God during the intervention include Alana and Anna, both of whom showed an interest in the subject from the beginning but who seem to go through a re-evaluation of views.

10.2.1 What are the possible explanations for change?

As with any qualitative research there are many variables which could explain the changes seen in existential thinking: the general growth in confidence on its own could be explained by the increased maturity an academic year brings and by the experience of attending secondary school for a year. Indeed, under the pre-2015 Key Stage 3 levels system, the expected progress would on average be two levels of progress over a key stage which equates to two sub-levels per year (DfE, 2013). The changes could also be accounted for by the exposure to the secondary RE curriculum which, going on the students' responses to Q5 (How much RE did you do at primary school?) in the questionnaire, was probably quite different to what they had experienced before. Exposing the students to ideas which most had never encountered before, or which they had seen and heard presented in a different way, may have had an impact on their engagement in the subject. It is possible that the added exposure to RE for some students was enough to initiate a change in response; this lack of exposure to RE also borne out by

answers given to Q5, by the majority of the cohort, which in both questionnaires said they had little experience of RE at Primary School. If this was true and Year 7 was the first time many of them had been systematically exposed to a curriculum asking them to engage with existential questioning and thinking, it is unsurprising some may have changed or developed their responses.

Some of the topics studied may also have provoked more interest than others and have encouraged more existential engagement. For example, the topic on Buddha and happiness provoked a response from students who had, until that point, not contributed much. Familiarity with the content of a question also seemed to make a difference in the responses seen in the questionnaires and interviews.

Many of the suggestions above may have supported the development of existential thinking, and for different students the development would have been a combination of varying factors. However, from to the comments made by the students in the questionnaires and interviews, my observations in the classroom, and from the data drawn from the students' written output, I argue that it is plausible that teaching which embedded BLP learning habits, particularly those of empathy, metacognition and revising, also contributed to these changes. Indeed, for some students, it supported their improvement in existential thinking.

10.2.2 Why were some students resistant to existential thinking?

Stephen's case study is an example of where exposure to the learning habits especially that of empathy, seemed to have made a change to his participation and attitude in RE and this was emulated by several others. However, even the development of empathy did not have the same effect on all the students. In their learning diaries, some indicated a struggle with the idea of empathy: Maria states, 'I listen to other viewpoints but I will not think about that view' and Otis writes 'I listen but am not sympathetic in any way'.

Resistance to get involved in RE lessons was seen before the research intervention began officially, with the attitude from a minority of students that RE had nothing to offer them. For example, the question 'Why do we have to do RE as we are not religious?' was raised more than once. In my field notes, especially early on in the research intervention, I also noted down several times comments about what the point of RE is, why do they need to study the viewpoints of other people and the view that their way of seeing the world was obviously the right one (6/12/16).

This reluctance to participate was expressed in several ways over the research intervention: for some students the issue with existential thinking came from a reluctance to engage with any of the personal reflection activities and this was seen in some students not engaging in any debates and by meeting my questions with silence. In Leo's case study, this attitude can be seen, where in the end the quality of his work does not improve, but regresses.

10.2.2.1 A lack of confidence

The students' reluctance of some students may have myriad explanations: in the first instance it was probably a matter of confidence as there were a number of students who initially lacked the confidence to express their personal views as part of their written work. For example, the first opportunity given to the class to talk about their own views was when they designed a symbol to represent their likes and dislikes, personality, beliefs and values. Most students focused on the 'what I like and dislike' aspect of this task; some commented on their personalities; but few commented on their beliefs and values, and when they did it was often done with little detail or explanation. Over the course of the research intervention this issue for many improved as they settled into school life and became more confident in sharing their beliefs and values.

10.2.2.2 Beyond the factual

For others, some of the issues in RE seemed to stem from the idea that a lesson could ask for a student's viewpoint, rather than just factual questions, about a body of content. For example, in a lesson in the Introductory unit of work where the students had been looking at the role of places of worship and the importance and meaning of worship, they were asked to design their own special place which should contain their own selection of significant objects and symbols. Many of the class did engage with the task as I had asked, by designing a space which expressed what and why they felt was important in life (8/11/16). However, I also refer to this incident in Stephen's case study (chapter 8) where in response to this task several of the students designed pseudo-churches with crosses, stained glass and bibles, when, as professed atheists, that for most of them these objects meant little to them. When asked why they had

not carried out the task as requested, some of the students said they had been confused and did not know what to include, but Stephen, with others in agreement, added to this that he was unsure why I was asking personal questions in an RE lesson when they were not religious. A comparable situation occurred in another task, a few lessons later, where after looking at the idea of sacred texts I asked the group to design their own mini sacred book, which, like the place of worship, should include pictures, lyrics for songs and quotations that inspired them. The reaction to this task was for some students to include very little and, when asked why some had not completed this very well, I was told again they did not understand as they were not religious and so did not know what to put in the book.

It is possible that the confusion arose in these tasks due to the terminology used: words such as worship, sacred both have religious connotations, and despite any reassurances that I was not looking for a 'religious' response and I wanted something personal from their experience, they still associated the terms with religion and not themselves.

10.2.2.3 No right or wrong answers

Another possible reason for some student resistance is that some of them did not want to share their feelings or saw doing so as a sign of weakness. Students such as Stephen found it difficult to deal with the fact that there were often no right or wrong answers, and with this comes a sense of uncertainty which some were perhaps not emotionally mature enough to deal with. Stephen and others also found it difficult to engage with the lessons as they did not like getting things wrong, and in their mind, if someone disagreed with their view, they had

made a mistake. Stephen, in Questionnaire One comments ‘I think that I get things wrong and I start to get worried’. Existential questions are by their very nature open, and I can understand why this may cause some students to be anxious when they are used to lessons where the emphasis is on answering questions correctly. For Stephen, his confidence in the open-ended nature of approaching existential questions grew, but for one or two of the students they were not willing to engage in the lessons no matter what I said or what techniques were employed. For example, when asked in the second questionnaire (Q6) if they had enjoyed RE so far one remarks ‘It is not to my interest’ (Chris).

10.2.2.4 Suspicion

Another reason why some students may have been reluctant to participate in existential thinking is the suspicion of some of them about what RE lessons are trying to do to them. Despite my yearly comment that ‘I am not a nun and I do not live in my cupboard’, there is always the notion that I am trying to convert them to be religious. From some students there is also a reluctance to understand that people do not need to be religious to engage with existential thinking and that atheism is another opinion and not necessarily fact. This attitude was reflected in a comment noted in the field notes where a student argued that science had disproved God’s existence. This view on its own is entirely understandable and is something held by many people, however, within the context of the lesson they argued it was not possible to proof God’s existence but refused to accept the possibility that the opposite could also be true - it was not possible for science to disprove the existence of God either (31/01/07). Also, due to a pervading anti-religious sentiment in the views of some students, getting involved with existential thinking may have been considered ‘uncool’ and could have made those who

did participate a figure of fun. Evidence for the latter was extrapolated from the negative comments in the questionnaires, and my personal experience of such attitudes in other classes of students of a similar age.

10.2.2.5 Religious background

Another possible source of reluctance was the religious background or not of the students. In the questionnaire data, the number of students who claim to be atheists drops from thirteen (Questionnaire One) to seven (Questionnaire Two) which shows a change of view and some engagement in existential thinking (see appendix 6). This data also shows that there is a correlation between those with atheistic beliefs (Leo and Chris) and those who remained negative about the subject until the end of the research intervention. Leo, for example, is responsible for the response to Q5 in the First Questionnaire that RE 'has nothing to do with me as I am not religious'. Also in the second questionnaire he stated that RE does not affect me.

However, the rest of the data did not show that all atheist students were hostile towards existential thinking. Stephen, Laura and Martha, for example, are all students who began with atheistic opinions (and for Stephen and Laura this remained the same) but rather than refusing to engage with the lesson they all showed themselves eventually to be interested in and proficient in asking and answering existential questions. Many of those from religious backgrounds too were good at asking existential questions, for example Ada, Sonia and Orla but there were some students who stated they were Christian but never really got involved in

the lessons or express much understanding of their religious faith. A lack of religious faith may have played a role in some of the negative feelings towards the subject, but on its own it was not a deciding factor either way.

10.2.2.6 Previous attainment

Another area which may also have facilitated some resistance from some students was the previous attainment of the group as a whole. As I outline in chapter 5 I had no control over which group I was timetabled and although the group was technically mixed ability there were 29/31 students were classed as middle or low attainers according to their performance at KS2. As a consequence, several of the students were SEND and some had literacy and numeracy issues as well as emotional problems and anxieties. However, there does not seem to be any parallel between the students who did not engage and those who did and their previous academic attainment. What it did account for was a lack of confidence for some students to express views, on occasion difficulties in accessing existential material and for some it limited the amount and quality of written work that was produced. There were three students who were on the autistic spectrum, and this too may have contributed to some of the black and white thinking of some.

10.2.2.7 Previous educational experiences

Another explanation for the reluctance may partly be explained by their educational experiences up to that point which will probably have been dominated by preparing for SATS; where lessons then may have been predominantly factual. I also infer from the questionnaire data - where the majority of the students said they had had little experience of RE - that down

to this lack of what the students recognised as RE at primary school, their experience of the subject was also probably quite limited. This issue was also illustrated by Larkin *et al.* in their RE-flect project where they found that none of the primary schools involved followed the Local Education Authority's RE Agreed Syllabus and the RE provision 'was ad hoc, and lessons often focused on ethical and environmental issues or simplistic creative activities' (2020, p176). In primary schools where RE is taught more explicitly it can also be very different to that offered in a secondary school where they are faced with a lesson which has a body of knowledge to be learnt and also asks for their personal views on a number of religious, moral and philosophical issues. Whatever the reality, there was obviously a significant enough difference between the diets of RE at primary and secondary school for many of the students not to recognise RE when faced with it at secondary. Views from home may also have a bearing on how a student engages in the existential content of the lesson, if existential conversations do not occur, or are openly rejected. For example, in the questionnaire data, more than half the students claim that religious, moral or philosophical ideas are not discussed at home because they are not religious (Seth) or there is no interest in God or religion (James).

10.2.2.8 What helped?

For many of the students, their resistance to participating was resolved over the year and many became engaged with the existential thinking in the lesson. This can be seen through Stephen's and Martha's case studies, some of the responses to the Second Questionnaire and Interview and the general improvement in the students' written output.

Student confidence and anxiety about the subject were the biggest barriers to existential thinking. One way to tackle the lack of confidence was through the creation of a metacognitive classroom environment where the students were encouraged to develop a 'can-do' attitude. Unpicking and developing learning habits using a reflective diary also helped with confidence, as the students understood that they could develop and improve their learning habits. In terms of the anxiety some students had over what I was doing, over time most students came to see that my aim was to help them improve in their ability to learn, and that being able to discuss and evaluate key existential questions was also important for their general education.

In terms of subject content, what was covered also helped in the overall engagement from the students. For some students merely being exposed to ideas different from their own would have, as Valk (2009) argues, simultaneously encouraged them to engage in self-reflection. Topics which were more familiar or had some personal significance to the students also motivated the students. The unit on the Buddha and his teachings on happiness, for example, was very popular and provoked comments from some who had, until that point, not contributed much to the lessons. For example, in the field notes it is recorded that Toby, who had until that point been quiet in lessons (when asked to comment on when they thought Buddha was happy in his life and why) he commented 'it was easier to empathise with Buddha's views on happiness than he had thought' (26/05/17).

10.3 Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?

Metacognition features prominently in the intervention lessons insofar as students, using their learning diaries, were asked to comment on how well they had understood and used the learning habits as they were introduced. This encouragement to reflect on themselves as learners also for some students provoked personal introspection on the existential issues we were covering in lesson. This can be seen in the responses to both the second questionnaires and interviews when for example some students (such as Ada, Laura and Eve) comment on how the learning habits have widened their viewpoints, encouraged them to think more deeply, and challenged the assumption that they are always right. Indeed, some of the learning habits seem to have played a more prominent role than others in the development of learning habits in general. Stephen's case study, for example, seems to suggest a particular relationship between empathy and development in existential thinking. The other habit which was also seemed to have an impact on the students was that of revising. In the case studies, for example, Stephen and Martha all comment on how their views have changed.

10.3.1 Why are metacognition and revising important for existential thinking in RE?

Neither metacognition nor revising perform significantly highly in the second questionnaire in Q16, which asked the students to select the learning habits they feel they have developed. Despite this, a closer examination of the data suggests that metacognition and revising as closely linked learning habits are, in turn, also important for the development of existential thinking for some students.

The term metacognition was not introduced officially to the students until later in the school year, although the importance of self-reflection and self-regulation was emphasised from the very beginning. Indeed, this is acknowledged by one of the students when in the field notes the comment is recorded 'that they do this metacognition all the time' (26/04/17). Students were issued with a learning diary to help them understand themselves as learners. Implicit to this was the encouragement to develop a positive mindset: to know and be honest with themselves about their strengths and weaknesses, to set and act on targets for improvement and to give them the tools to regulate their own learning. As well as encouraging the students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses regarding their knowledge and understanding of the subject content in RE, the metacognition learning habit was also used to encourage the students to reflect on the materials they were studying, to compare and contrast the insights gained with their own views.

The development of metacognition is also closely tied up with the learning habit of revising, which is the facility to revisit, adapt and change thoughts, views and plans, where someone might change their mind or feel differently about an idea. Based on their ability to be self-reflective and to empathise with views different from their own, the students were encouraged to be open to the fact that their views on existential questions might change or develop and that this was perfectly normal.

Evidence for the effect of metacognition and revising appears, for example, in the second questionnaire in a number of cases. One anonymous response states that the process of filling

in a learning diary helped them to be more self-reflective and to develop the learning habits. This is echoed by another student (Owen) who comments on how the diary helped him to learn about the habits, and then how to utilise them to develop his learning further. Similar observations arise in the data from the second interview. There too, the ability to revise is evidenced by Ada and Lauren who both remark on how at the beginning of the year they assumed they were right in their views and did not see why others might view things differently to them. As Ada points out, putting yourself into someone else's shoes 'makes us see from their perspective' and not all people have the same views. Both Ada and Lauren also comment that the learning habits, particularly that of revising, had encouraged them to widen their viewpoints which in turn has helped them to think more deeply about issues such as life after death.

This idea of widening viewpoints is also seen in Stephen's case study, (also Ada's) where initially he does not engage with the views of others particularly well, but in response to Q18 (Has exploring the different learning habits in RE has helped you to become a better RE student?) in Interview 2 he states that that he 'has become more inquisitive' and this interest is reflected in the data by an increasing willingness to engage more personally with the subject materials. Stephen's willingness to engage with the religious views can be seen in a lesson on Buddha and the meaning of happiness where he questions whether Buddha's view on craving went too far, as he states that craving is actually important for humans otherwise we would all still be living in caves. In this same lesson there were also comments from other students who said they could see the point of what Buddha was trying to say, and how it had encouraged them to reflect more on their personal views (26/06/2017).

More evidence for revising and for its effect on existential thinking can be seen in the changes in the students' responses to the existential content of the lessons as reported in the two questionnaires. Between the questionnaires, changes in responses to both the quantitative and qualitative questions indicated some increased engagement with the existential content of the questions. Q3 (Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews?) is a case in point: between the two questionnaires there is a change in response which indicates that for some students some reflection on and re-evaluation of their views on religion and worldviews has taken place. Other examples of changes in response are the answers to Q7 (Do you believe in God?) which in the second questionnaire are much more decisive yes/no responses. The changes and certainty here indicate some reflection and re-evaluation of students' views on the existence of God (see Martha's case study for example). Even when the quantitative data changes little from one questionnaire to another, the qualitative responses are often more detailed and show some development in thought.

This research project mirrors in some ways some of the findings claimed for RE and metacognition by the RE-flect project based at the University of Exeter. As part of the project, researchers worked with a number of primary schools to create what was termed 'metacognitively oriented learning environments' as an implicit feature of their RE lessons (Larkin *et al*. 2020, p176). Reflecting the ideas of Valk (2009) they aimed to explore the claim that students become more open and capable of responding to contested truth claims, if they are encouraged to be self-reflective of their own views in the light of others. They found that where students were encouraged to develop the metacognitive skills required 'to reflect on,

critique and possibly alter their thinking processes' (Larkin *et al.* 2020, p177) they did engage with the 'big questions'.

RE-flect's observations on the role of metacognition and its benefits in the RE classroom were indeed evidenced in my research intervention; however, even though some students did become more introspective, I did not always see a concomitant interest in the views of others. Also, as I was dealing with students of secondary age rather than primary, it was more difficult to get some of my older students to engage with the existential material and encouraging self-reflection did not alter their thinking processes. Why this was the case was probably down to the number of factors, for example, being older some of the students were more entrenched in their beliefs and views, and some were more sceptical and less open to change than most younger children would be. My research also showed that the experience of RE at primary school was very varied and as a consequence some of the students had already set their mind against RE before they arrived in my classroom as evidenced in the first questionnaire.

My research has suggested therefore that the creation of a metacognitive learning environment, on its own, may work for some students and support an improvement in their existential thinking. However, for some students more was needed to convince them to engage in the first place and this came from an unexpected quarter through the introduction and development of the empathy learning habit.

10.3.2 Why is empathy important for existential thinking in RE?

As outlined in the findings (chapters 6-9) the teaching of the empathy learning habit is mentioned by several students as having a positive effect on their ability to engage with others (Stephen, Eve, Anna, Maria, Wyatt, Laura, Ada). Empathy was specifically unpacked with the class 9/1/17 – see a shift in attitude – first detected. Making students aware of the idea of empathy, how to try and develop it had a positive effect on many of the students engagement with the subject. Why this is the case is unclear, however, by drawing attention to the leaning habit made some students see it as something they could practice. For others, the expectations of trying to understand what others think, believe and feel may have been a new experience. As commented upon earlier, there is no way of knowing if any of the students were really empathetic or had just learnt more about how to be, either way it did encourage some of the students to engage more with views which were not their own.

What the use of the empathy learning habit showed, is that metacognition is not always enough to facilitate self-reflection and engagement with the religious and worldviews of others. The students have been encouraged to engage with the metacognitive aspect of the lesson from the beginning and given time to reflect individually and in groups. However, it was not until the empathy learning habit that some students, like Stephen, seemed to 'get it'. it gave him the motivation to look at other perspectives and helped him to realise that they were not the sole arbiters of truth.

Whereas I had initially hypothesised that using the BLP learning habits to encourage reflection and to create a metacognitive learning environment would be conducive to the development of existential thinking, I had not expected to find that empathy would be as important as it became to be for some of the students.

The BLP learning habit of empathy relies on the assumption that it can be taught. However, historically, the idea that empathy could be taught was disputed: Davis (1990), drawing on the work of Stein, argued that it could be facilitated but not taught because 'when empathy occurs, we find ourselves experiencing it, rather than directly causing it to happen'. More recent research suggests that empathy is not a soft skill you either have or have not, but neural imaging indicates it is actually a hardwired human capacity we all possess in differing degrees (see Riess, 2018, 2017; Decety *et al.* 2015). In contrast to Davis (1990), Riess states that many studies have shown that empathy is a 'vital human competency which is mutable and can be taught' (2018p4).

Despite being a complex area, the recent literature on empathy suggests that not only can it be taught but it has several dimensions: emotional (affective), cognitive (thinking) and motivation for empathic response or concern (see Riess 2018; Decety and Knafo. 2015; Myers and Hodges 2007).

Emotional empathy, according to Myers and Hodges, consists of three aspects: 'The first is feeling the same emotion as another person… The second component, personal distress,

refers to one's own feelings of distress in response to perceiving another's plight… The third emotional component, feeling compassion for another person' (2007, p296). Despite the subjective nature, emotional empathy can be developed in an individual through becoming more self-reflective when it comes to our own emotional states, and in training ourselves to control our reactions to others. However, emotional empathy is much easier to show to those with whom you have something in common, and it is much harder, or even absent, with those who are seen as different or other (Riess, 2018 p21).

Cognitive empathy first requires an individual to have developed a 'theory of mind' (a psychological developmental milestone which starts at about 4 or 5 years); this means the individual understands that the reality of someone else is different to theirs. For example, that could be to learn that one's thoughts are individual, and that one can believe and think about things in a different way. Once this is understood, it can lead to 'perspective taking' which Riess refers to as the 'active component of cognitive empathy' (2018, p23). Perspective taking involves trying to see the world through the eyes of another, and accurately guessing what the thoughts and feelings of someone else might be (Riess, 2018; Myers and Hodges, 2007). As with emotional empathy, a lack of commonality with an individual or a group can make cognitive empathy difficult because it requires 'attention, imagination and curiosity' which can be very demanding on the individual. However, with effort, the barriers to cognitive empathy can be broken down and the reasons one may be distrustful of another person or group, for example, can disappear (Riess, 2018, p23ff). Both emotional and cognitive empathy can then lead on to empathic response which is the aspect of empathy which most people may well

associate with the concept; that is, the inner concern for others which can motivate acts of kindness and compassion *(ibid,* p24).

The BLP learning habit of empathy is described as 'putting yourself into the shoes of someone else' which, in the first instance, reflects the cognitive rather than the emotional approach to empathy. It is, as Riess points out, cognitively demanding, which will be more difficult for some than others. As noted earlier and reinforced by psychological research (Riess, 2018), cognitive empathy requires the student to be curious, to listen and pay attention (notice detail), and to use their imagination to try and enter into some understanding of what someone else may be thinking or feeling. The BLP approach treats empathy as something which can be facilitated and nurtured in the classroom. In other words, what it means to be empathetic can be picked apart and students can be given opportunities to practise, reflect and develop these insights. These insights in turn could lead students to a greater willingness to entertain and discuss the views of others, and to potentially learn from these experiences. For some, this could even lead to a more lasting effect where students develop their empathetic response.

I commented on the emotional response to existential questions in chapter 4, when I pointed out that those who are 'not good' at existential thinking may be so because they are not used to their views being challenged and that in some this engendered a kind of existential insecurity. It was observed in the research lessons that an individual student's reaction to the content of the lessons is affective as well as cognitive, that is, how they think about something often affects the way they feel, especially if some of those feelings are strong. In turn this can

influence how an individual may engage with a lesson and if a student's feelings are negative towards the content of the lessons, this can prevent them from participating fully.

Stephen's case study (and Martha's too) demonstrates this emotional response when he talks about how when his views were challenged, he comments that he felt like he was making mistakes rather than realising that there can be more than one point of view to an issue. The emotional response to existential thinking can interfere with a student's ability to empathise and see things from other perspectives. This is also mirrored in the questionnaire data, where those who professed to be religious from the outset were generally the same students who engaged with the existential content of the lesson from the start (see Sonia's case study). For those like Stephen who were much more difficult to convince, it was not until the explicit unpicking of the empathy learning habit (as he acknowledges in the Second Questionnaire) that he started to allow himself to engage with the views of others in a more serious way.

A relationship between cognitive empathy and metacognition is supported by the work of Riess (2018), Martin (2018) and Vaughan (2002) who argue that to engage with the views of others involves both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and sensitivities. As is seen in Stephen's case study, the metacognitive elements of the lessons had encouraged him to become more self-aware of his strengths and weaknesses as a learner. He understood that he was not great at being empathetic and that this was something he was working on. However, for Stephen and others to really learn from the views of others it took the unpicking and

development of the empathy learning habit for him to really see the perspectives of others as worth his time. As Lucas and Claxton state:

> The more you master the ability to look at the world through the eyes of an increasing range of other people, the more it becomes possible to learn greater relative objectivity, and to become more skilful at looking for ways of enhancing 'the good of all', rather than just 'me and my friends' (2010, p163).

The above illustrates the important relationship between the metacognition, revising and empathy learning habits, in that, for some students, empathy seems to be a prerequisite for improving engagement with existential thinking and for any change or development of views. As Gadamer (2004) argues if genuine dialogue is to be had with those whose views are different to our own, one needs to be willing to question one's own values, beliefs and assumptions. The key idea here is being *'to be willing'* and it is this underlying motivation which the teaching of the empathy learning habit helped some students to reach.

This is not to say that to engage with existential questions students must develop the empathy and metacognition learning habits. Many people are quite capable of discussing these sorts of questions without ever being empathetic or engaging in metacognition. However, the aims of RE as personal development, through the development of existential thinking, is more than just an intellectual exercise. To be 'good' at existential thinking, as I commented in chapter 4.5 and 5.4.3, requires some personal investment from those engaging with the questions. It is about being able to go beyond the study of religion and worldviews to the questions of meaning and value which lie behind them. Larkin *et al.* also comment, that to go beyond just

a ‘trade of knowledge’ in the classroom requires ‘reflection on thinking, self-awareness and monitoring of thinking… facilitated by a classroom environment which provides the psycho-social conditions necessary for metacognition to develop’ (2019, p176). In a similar vein, Grimmitt argues the classroom pedagogy for RE as personal development should act as a stimulus for each student to develop ‘self-knowledge’ - where a student is encouraged to become more aware of their beliefs and values which underpin who they are. It is this development of ‘self-knowledge’ which Grimmitt believes links directly to the personal development of the student (1987, p159). The development of this ‘self-knowledge’, as shown in this study, can be enhanced for some students, by the creation of a learning environment where students are explicitly taught, among others, the learning habits of metacognition and revising.

10.3.3 Why only some learning habits?

The learning habits of empathy, metacognition and revising feature widely in my results as being influential in developing existential thinking. Due to their interrelated nature they all play a role in one way or another: some facilitated the development of the metacognitive learning environment. For example, the habits of managing distractions, listening, noticing, collaboration and perseverance were all taught to encourage the students to understand why it was important to be keep focused in lessons and how to engage in a positive manner whether in groups or individually. The influence of these learning habits also contributed to development in other learning habits. The interrelatedness is pointed out by both Martha (see case study) and Zain who comment on how the habits are linked together, and Sonia (see case

study) and Orla who also remark on how perseverance and noticing are the basis of learning anything.

Some habits were instrumental in the development of other habits, as already noted (p239) the metacognition and revising learning habits are tied to each other. Furthermore, reasoning and questioning also played a key role in encouraging students to ask the right questions and to think for themselves, and these learning habits supported the development of revising and metacognition. Wyatt and Martha, for example, both comment on how the learning habits have helped them to think and 'See religious side of things'.

Empathy worked in a similar way: key to its development were several other learning habits such as listening, making links and noticing. The interrelated nature of the learning habits is also commented upon in the responses to the Second Questionnaire, when Eva remarks on how 'listening' has helped her to develop empathy and the ability to express her opinions. Wyatt also states in the Second Interview that in order to empathise better he 'need to listen more to what others think.' This is reflected in one of the lessons on happiness in which the ability to listen well is cited as being an important habit to develop to be able to reflect and consider ideas from their own and others' perspectives (16/05/17).

In the field notes making links was also recorded as essential for trying to develop the 'empathy' learning habit, as it encouraged the students to make links between their own views and those of the religious individuals we were studying. Otis states in the Second Interview

that he needs ‘to think about other people’s views by ‘making links between their own views and the views of others.’

The role of ‘noticing’ was also quoted as being important in the development of empathy. Indeed, in the Second Questionnaire in answer to Q16 (Which learning habit do you think you have developed the most this year?) ‘noticing’ gets the most votes from the students. In the second learning review, which was held towards the end of the research intervention, Owen writes ‘I have also used my noticing skills to notice other people’s opinions,’ which suggests that the idea of paying attention to the views of others can contribute to students noticing the views of others which they may not have done otherwise. Noticing appears in the unit of work (appendix 12) more than any other learning habit, and it also appears to have played a crucial role in encouraging the students to engage with the materials presented to them. This can be seen in comments made by the students, such as Sonia in Questionnaire Two, when she says that noticing is helping her to learn and pick up on those things she would have missed before.

All the learning habits had a role to play in the development of existential thinking from facilitating a metacognitive learning environment to the development of learning behaviours needed to support other habits like empathy which seem to have played a more obvious role in the development of existential thinking.

10.4 Concluding Reflection

In this chapter I have discussed the main findings of my study. I have shown why it is plausible to argue that students' existential thinking in RE can be improved using the Building Learning Power Framework. I discuss the role of metacognition and how exposing some students to views different from their own can at the same time can inspire personal introspection, but how for some students, especially those who are older, more than this is needed. I outline how I found that during and after teaching the empathy learning habit that a change is seen in the way that some of the students, such as Stephen, Ada and Martha (see case studies) engage with the subject and become more willing to learn from the views of others. I look at other possible explanations for the phenomenon that I have seen and accept that many of them may also have played a role, such as the content taught and the natural progression of a Year 7 student, however I still hold that the use of learning habits embedded into an RE curriculum played a significant role in encouraging some of the students to engage and learn from the views of others. I have also looked at the reasons why some students were resistant to existential thinking such as student confidence and anxiety about the subject and how these issues were overcome in ways that were often related to BLP, such as a development of self-reflectiveness or a growth in empathy.

Chapter 11

CONCLUSION

11.1 Overview of study

The aim of this study was to examine the following questions:

How does explicit teaching of learning habits support the development of existential thinking in Religious Education?

- Do different groups of students respond differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking?
- Do some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE?
- How does this exploratory study of the impact of learning habits on the students' development of existential thinking translate into conclusions for the pedagogy of RE today?

In this chapter I summarise the rationale behind the terms of my research questions and how I have shown it is plausible to suggest that the explicit teaching of the BLP learning habits played a role in supporting the existential thinking of some students. I also outline the limitations of this study, implications for future research and recommendations

In the first two chapters of this study, I set out my how my view of the aims for RE centres on the human development model as advocated by Grimmitt (1987, 2000) and Teece (2008,

2010b). This model for RE, I argue, focuses on the importance of ensuring that the knowledge taught in RE can also contribute to a student's personal growth both emotionally and spiritually, hence the term 'personal development'. The personal development is not confessional, as this would be inappropriate for a non-faith based school, but an attempt to encourage what Grimmitt (1987) calls a 'dialectical relationship' between the student's own religion or worldview and those of others, in which students explore existential questions and issues through the study of religion and worldviews.

I raised the issue of trying to engage the students in this 'dialectical relationship', and bemoaned the fact that there was very little written which addresses the difficulties some students have in engaging with the religions and worldviews of others and how this issue could be solved. I introduced the ways my research sought to address the issues of personal engagement by exploring whether the integration of the BLP learning habits into an RE curriculum could support the development of existential thinking. I also explored some of the current issues in RE raised by the religion and worldviews approach to RE and the role of knowledge. I explain that there is still support for RE as personal development, and suggest that it can emerge from the current debates as a better version of itself.

In chapter 3, I explored the nature of Building Learning Power, its position as a form of *learning to learn,* and how, as a way to encourage metacognition and self-regulation, it seeks to help students understand themselves as learners and ultimately how to learn better. I outlined how it was through my interest in BLP, later confirmed by Claxton's admission that it was based on

the Buddhist principles of being a powerful learner, that I began to speculate whether the development of learning habits in an RE curriculum could better enable student to build the self-knowledge and create the buy-in needed for RE as personal development.

In chapter 4, I looked more closely at the nature of personal development in education, its close links to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students (Ofsted, 2012, 2016, 2019, 2022), and - specifically for RE - the idea of spiritual development. As it is unclear how best to describe spiritual development within RE without resorting to some form of religiosity, I explored ideas associated with the term, and what emerges from the literature is the more universal concept of existential thinking which can operate in both religious and secular frameworks. I also explored a possible link between the development of the BLP learning habits as part of a metacognitive framework, and how such a link could encourage the qualities and skills needed to improve existential thinking.

In chapter 5, I outlined the curriculum design for my exploratory research project in which my aim was to explore whether the integration of the BLP learning habits as part of an RE curriculum could help support students' development in existential thinking. I also explained my markers for development in existential thinking used to help determine any development, and the 'I can/I cannot' chart used by the students as the basis of conversations to improve their use of the learning habits. The chapter also looked at the issues associated with my research in terms of positionality and generalisability, and considered the tools used to conduct the research, how it was analysed and the ethical considerations.

Chapters 6 to 10 were dedicated to the presentation and analysis of data from the questionnaires, interviews and students' written output (see appendices 3-11) which provided answers for my research questions.

Overall, the data suggests that while there are several variables which could explain the improvements seen in existential thinking, the impact of the integrated learning habit and RE curriculum had a positive effect on the confidence of many of the students, and it supported the development of existential thinking in some students. However, it is hard to say, without a control group, whether the students would have behaved in a similar way without the integration of the learning habits. This may have been the case for some of the students, especially those who were not that interested (see Leo's case study); however, as the impact of the learning habits was recognised by many of the students in what they said and wrote, I believe the learning habits did support some of the students in developing their existential thinking.

According to markers for existential development (figure 9), the **different groups of students responded differently to attempts to develop their existential thinking.** The effect varied from student to student: for some, it was how the learning habits helped in building their confidence in the subject, for others it was the development of self-reflection, and for some it was the establishment of something akin to Grimmitt's 'dialectical relationship' in which they were not only being introspective, but also engaging with the views of others.

Some students did not engage much with the existential content of the lesson, and nothing I did seemed to change their attitude. I looked into several possible reasons for this, but it was difficult to pin-point the cause. I ruled out previous attainment, as was there was not enough evidence to support this assertion in my data, although it would be something to consider in a bigger data set. Having a faith background or not seemed to affect participation, as all the students who were resistant to existential thinking claimed to be atheists, and many of those who were happy to engage with existential thinking were from religious backgrounds. However, not everyone who claimed to be atheist refused to engage (see the Stephen case study), and not everyone from a religious background was happy to get involved.

The data also showed that **some learning habits play a greater role than others in supporting the development of existential thinking in RE.** In terms of the learning habits, the role of metacognition was a noticeable factor in student engagement. My findings support the importance of metacognitive learning environments in RE, as argued for by Larkin *et al.* (2020). In teaching the metacognition learning habit, I was aware of the way it encouraged some students to be more introspective, as shown in their written work; however, it did not follow that these students were automatically more interested in finding out more about the religions and worldviews of others. In contrast, some students were happy to talk about their own thoughts and feelings, but were not necessarily any more interested in engaging with the views of others.

It was the introduction of the empathy learning habit which made a difference to some students. After this habit was unpicked in lesson (through the discussion of what empathy means, what helps people to be better at empathy, and its importance) it provoked, in some students, an emotional reaction which created the buy-in needed for them to understand that it was worth learning from the views of others, and - more importantly - that there was nothing to fear from doing so. The introduction of empathy to the metacognitive learning environment, facilitated by the teaching of the BLP learning habits, suggests that existential thinking was encouraged and supported through a learning powered RE curriculum.

11.2 Limitations of the study and implications for future research

My research was limited in several ways: the ideas generated were typical of small-scale educational research, with the numerous variables involved meaning it would be difficult to apply the findings to other contexts. On this basis, the external validity of this research would benefit from further research in a larger, more varied student population. Despite this, limitation the small-scale nature of this study does not mean it has no value (Bassey, 2001; Larkin, *et al.* 2020): it has improved my own classroom practice, and has informed that of the department in which I work, it has also generated debate, and been shared more widely with other colleagues.

I also felt constrained in what I could do with the class: I was given free rein to embed the BLP learning habits into my lessons, but I was required to deliver the required content set out for all Year 7 students. This restrictive issue was an issue for my study in the first unit of work, as

it was designed to be a religious literacy module which focused on key knowledge rather than existential questions. If I had been able to redesign the whole curriculum, I would have had the opportunity to include more suitable existential content from the beginning.

I was also timetabled to teach only one Year 7 group which limited the number of students with whom I was able to conduct the research. Also, although the class was mixed ability, their KS2 data meant they were overwhelmingly classed (27/31) as being in the middle and less able attainment bands. Consequently, literacy was an issue for some of the students and meant that some of the written responses to the questionnaires and the students' work were not always very extensive. If the group had been of a truly mixed ability, I would have had a broader range of students who were more capable of providing me with fuller accounts of their views and experiences, and from this I may have been able to see more changes.

I was also limited in who I could interview. As the students could opt in or out of the interviews, I had to work with those who volunteered. Stephen, my case study, did not volunteer to be interviewed, which was disappointing, as I could have asked him to explain in more depth his anxieties about the subject and the way in which the empathy learning habit had changed him.

As pointed out, as this was a small-scale study, the opportunity to apply its findings on a larger and more diverse student population would be interesting to see whether the findings were similar or different with a differing demographic of students; having more higher ability students would also help in the collection of written data.

Another area for further research is to explore the role of the learning habits (and particularly empathy), to investigate more clearly what social, emotional and psychological mechanisms are at play when this habit is taught and why, for some students, it triggered more engagement with the views of others.

Following on from the discussions in section 2.5, another area of further research could focus on what RE as personal development could look like, in light of the recent and on-going work on the role of worldviews, the introduction of the disciplinary approaches, and the teaching of epistemic knowledge. It would be interesting to consider how far the establishment of a metacognitive learning environment (not necessarily a specific BLP one) could contribute to, and support the changes, whilst also retaining the importance of student reflexivity.

11.3 Final thoughts and recommendations

In my final subsidiary research question, I stated **how does this exploratory study of the impact of learning habits on the students' development of existential thinking translate into conclusions for the pedagogy of RE today?** As research of a small-scale exploratory nature it is difficult to make any definite recommendations; however, as considered in section 5.3.4, the idea of 'fussy generalisations' (Bassey, 2001) is useful here. Whilst I cannot make any scientific claims about the findings of my research, it does not mean the insights gained from my small-scale research, cannot be of use: the insights gained on using a particular teaching method could be useful for others to explore in their own classrooms, and the ideas produced may provoke debate and reflection on teaching pedagogy and pedagogical procedures, which may

contribute to educational theory in RE. My hope is that that the unit of work in appendix 12 and section 5.4 can aid the reproducibility of my research, so that others can try the same methods, and contribute to an ongoing discussion about the role of metacognition and student reflexivity in the RE classroom.

My first recommendation is for anyone wanting to develop existential thinking in RE. To develop existential thinking I would first spend time creating a metacognitive learning environment. Which can be achieved through the creation of a classroom culture in which both the learning of content is supported, alongside the habits which underpin that learning. This can be achieved in a variety of ways (see appendix 12), and the use of techniques aimed at developing self-regulation, reflection and monitoring are important. For example, the use of a learning diary helps a student to monitor and regulate their learning. Techniques such as THINK/PAIR/SHARE and blind votes encourage self-reflection. To be a metacognitive learning environment, every opportunity needs to be taken to remind students of the environment by focusing on what the needs of the class are: if the content they are learning is difficult, then focus on perseverance, if it require them to work in groups, then focus on collaboration. Orchestrate activities to practise habits such as listening and questioning, and comment on them informally during lessons.

My second recommendation also focuses on those who want to develop existential thinking in RE, and I recommend that alongside metacognition, the concept of empathy should be introduced, because for some students, while they were good at self-reflection, they were not

so good at learning from others. Introducing empathy and unpacking its meaning helped some students see that learning about the views of others is worth their time. To do this, discuss what empathy means (as opposed to sympathy), and why different people find empathy an easy thing to do and why others find it more difficult. Look at stories or situations in which empathy is performed well, where it is not, and ask the students to comment on the scenarios. Consider why empathy is a good learning habit to develop in RE, and what might get in the way. A good way to introduce empathy is to use the story of Buddha, as his story has the potential to resonate with many young people (see appendix 12).

Appendices

Appendix One: Permission Letter: parents

July 2016

Dear Parent/Carer,

This year I am your child's Religious Education teacher and as part of my doctoral research at the University of Birmingham I will be conducting an in-class action research project with your child's RE class. The aim of this project is to explore whether the development of learning habits in RE lessons, such as questioning, reasoning and empathy can help students engage more with the big questions often asked in RE such as 'Do you believe in God? and 'How important is it to you to be happy?'

This research will involve all students completing a questionnaire in lesson time and then six of the students will be interviewed further; this process will be repeated at the end of the academic year in July 2017. The interviews will be recorded but these will only be used to create transcripts and will not be shared with any third parties. In addition, the findings of my research will be referred to in my doctoral thesis and may also be disseminated through any future journal and articles submissions. However, the identity of your child in both the questionnaires and the interviews will remain confidential at all times.

It would be great if all students could take some part in my research and so I would be very grateful if you could return the consent slip below indicating your permission for your child to be involved in the Religious Education Research Project by completing the questionnaire and, if asked, being interviewed.

Please note, even if you give your permission now you have the right to withdraw your child from this research project at any time and their responses will not be used. Also if no permission is received for your child to participate they will be given an alternative task to complete in lesson when the others complete the questionnaire.

Please do contact me if you have any concerns or questions.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Kristina Shakeshaft
Specialist Leader of Education and Leader of Learning

………..

Religious Studies Research Project, 2016-2017

Name ____

I give permission for my child to complete a questionnaire and, if chosen, to take part in an interview as part of the Religious Education Research Project

Signed ______________________________ Date ____________________

Partnership, a charitable company limited by guarantee,

Appendix Two: Permission Letter: students

Dear Student,

As part of my doctoral research at the University of Birmingham, I would like to conduct an in-class research project with your RE class. This would involve completing a questionnaire in lesson time and possibly being involved in an interview where I will ask you questions about the questionnaire you filled in and your responses to the questions. These questions will involve asking for your views on big questions such as 'Do you believe in God? and 'How important is it to you to be happy?'

It is important that I not only ask for your parents' permission for you to be involved in the project, but also that you are happy to complete a questionnaire and possibly be interviewed. Anything you write in the questionnaire or say in the interviews will be kept confidential.

It would be great if you could take part, but you do not have to complete the questionnaire and/or interview if you do not wish; instead you will be given an alternative task to complete.

Please return this consent form to Mrs Shakeshaft by ____________________ in C1.9.

Please do come and speak to me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Kristina Shakeshaft
Specialist Leader of Education and Leader of Learning

....

Religious Studies Research Project, 2016-2017

Name ____

Please tick the appropriate box:

☐ I am happy to complete both the questionnaire and, if chosen, to take part in an interview.

☐ I am happy to complete the questionnaire but, if chosen, *I do not wish* to be interviewed.

☐ *I do not wish* to complete the questionnaire or the interview.

Signed ______________________________ Date ______________________

Appendix Three: Questionnaire One and Two

Religious Education Questionnaire

Page 1: Page 1

Introduction

Dear Year 7,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire.

Your answers will form part of my research project for the University of Birmingham in which I will be exploring whether the development of learning habits in your RE lessons, such as questioning, reasoning and empathy can help you engage more with the big questions often asked in RE such 'Do you think that you have a soul? or 'What do you think happens to you when you die?"

Read the following questions carefully and answer them all as fully as you can - there are no right or wrong answers!

Your identity will be kept confidential but please complete sensibly.

Mrs Shakeshaft

Page 2

About You

These question are aimed at finding about a little bit of information about you - so please be as accurate as you can.

1. What is your name?

[ ]

2. Are you male or female?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

3. Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews? *(Please select all that apply.)*

- ☐ Atheism
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Christianity
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Humanism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ Sikhism
- ☐ Other

4. Do you talk about religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home?

- [ ] Regularly
- [ ] Sometimes
- [ ] No, such discussions are not encouraged
- [ ] It never comes up

4.a. Please explain your answer.

Page 3

Your experience of RE so far...

This section is just to get some idea of what you have experienced in RE so far, how much RE you have had and whether you have enjoyed it.

5. How much RE did you do at primary school?

- ☐ We did lots of RE
- ☐ We did some RE
- ☐ We occasionally did some RE
- ☐ We did very little RE
- ☐ We did not do any RE

6. Have you enjoyed RE so far?

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ It has been okay
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ No, I have not enjoyed RE so far

6.a. Please explain your answer.

Page 4

The Big Questions

Please read the following questions carefully; there are NO right or wrong answers so please be honest and answer in as much detail as you can.

If you cannot work out what a question means miss it out and move onto the next one; you can always return to it at the end.

7. Do you believe in God?

- ☐ Yes, I believe in God
- ☐ I am not sure if there is a God
- ☐ No, I do not believe in God
- ☐ I have no opinion on this question

7.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

8. If there is a God, what is God like? Please give reasons for your answer.

9. What do you think will happen to you when you die? Please give reasons for your answer.

10. Does life have any meaning for you?

- [ ] Yes, it does
- [ ] Sometimes
- [ ] No
- [ ] I have no opinion on this question

10.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

11. Do you think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Unsure
- [ ] I have no opinion on this question

11.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

12. Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

12.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

13. Is it important to you to be a good person?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Not important
- ☐ Unsure

13.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

14. Is being happy important to you?

- Very important
- Important
- Not so important
- Not important

14.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

15. Do you think you are in control of your life?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

15.a. Please give reasons for your answer above.

Appendix Four: Questionnaire Two: additional questions

Religious Education Questionnaire

Page 1: Page 1

Introduction

Dear Year 7,

You may remember that last October you completed a questionnaire for me - this is an exact copy of that survey (with one additional section at the end) to see if your views have changed or developed.

Your answers will form part of my research project for the University of Birmingham in which I will be exploring whether the development of learning habits in your RE lessons, such as questioning, reasoning and empathy can help you engage more with the big questions often asked in RE such 'Do you think that you have a soul? or 'What do you think happens to you when you die?"

Read the following questions carefully and answer them all as fully as you can - there are no right or wrong answers!

Your identity will be kept confidential but please complete sensibly.

Mrs Shakeshaft

Page 5: Page 5

The Learning Habits...

This section is in addition to the questionnaire you completed in October last year. It is asking you to think about the learning habits we have learnt about over the year. Please, as with all sections, be as honest and detailed as you can be in your answers.

16. Which *learning habits* do you think you have developed the most this year? *Select all that apply.*

- ☐ noticing
- ☐ reasoning
- ☐ managing distractions
- ☐ being resourceful
- ☐ metacognition (knowing what you are good at what you need to improve)
- ☐ empathy
- ☐ working in teams
- ☐ revising
- ☐ planning
- ☐ imitation
- ☐ making links
- ☐ listening
- ☐ perseverance
- ☐ questioning

17. Please give reasons for your selection above.

18. How far would you agree that exploring the different *learning habits* in RE has helped you to become a better RE student?

- ☐ Strongly agree

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

19. Please give reasons for your answer above.

Appendix Five: Sample of data: Questionnaire One

Online surveys

Religious Education Questionnaire

Response ID	Start date	Completion date
227948-227941-17521278	2 Nov 2016, 09:29 (GMT)	2 Nov 2016, 10:06 (GMT)

About You

1	What is your name?	
2	Are you male or female?	Female
3	Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews? (Please select all that apply.)	Atheism
4	Do you talk about religious, moral or philosophical ideas at home?	It never comes up
4.a	Please explain your answer.	we dont really talk about religons most of my family doesn't have one so we dont mention it

Your experience of RE so far...

5	How much RE did you do at primary school?	We did very little RE
6	Have you enjoyed RE so far?	It has been okay
6.a	Please explain your answer.	I haven't done much RE so I've had an alright time learning about it since I don't really know a lot and I do sometimes struggle with work .

The Big Questions

7	Do you believe in God?	I have no opinion on this question
7.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	I don't have a religion so to me god is just one of them things I cant be sure if god is an actual person

1 / 3

8	If there is a God, what is God like? Please give reasons for your answer.	He would be very generous and kind would want to help everyone , good and bad.

9	What do you think will happen to you when you die? Please give reasons for your answer.	I am not sure what will happen to me when I die but I do wish to start again , a new life .

10	Does life have any meaning for you?	Yes, it does
10.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	Lots of people say you get only one life and as a person I want to live that life and care for people around me who have cared for me in my younger life . People can choose there ways , since you only get one life.

11	Do you think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong)?	Unsure
11.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	I am unsure because I have no religion and have no opinion on god and about hell and heaven , although in life you should be punished for doing wrong but, be given another chance.

12	Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?	Yes
12.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	Everybody has something unique about them because of one thing, individuality . Every one should be treaded the same but every one is different and have different talents and unique personalitys

13	Is it important to you to be a good person?	Unsure
13.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	I'm not sure because everyone has different opinions , I think that other people can choose what happens in there life and to them it can mean anything

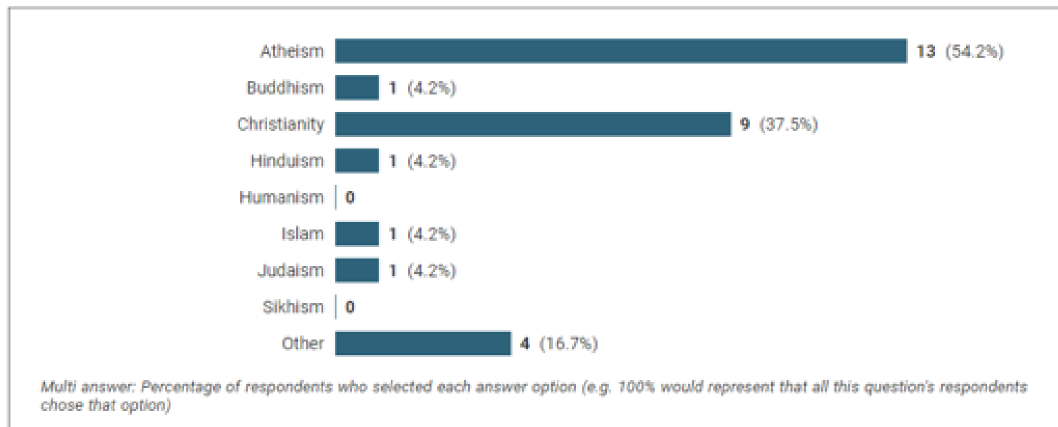
14	Is being happy important to you?	Very important
14.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	You only get one life so you need to be happy some times .

15	Do you think you are in control of your life?	Unsure
15.a	Please give reasons for your answer above.	You may make choices but other people can change it

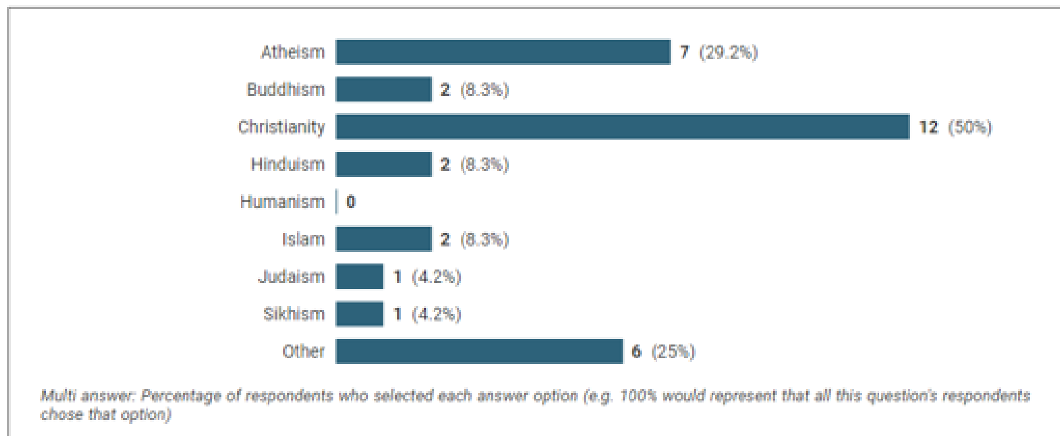
Appendix Six: Data: Tabulated Data: Questionnaire One and Two

Question 3 - Do you identify with any of the following religions or worldviews?'

Questionnaire One

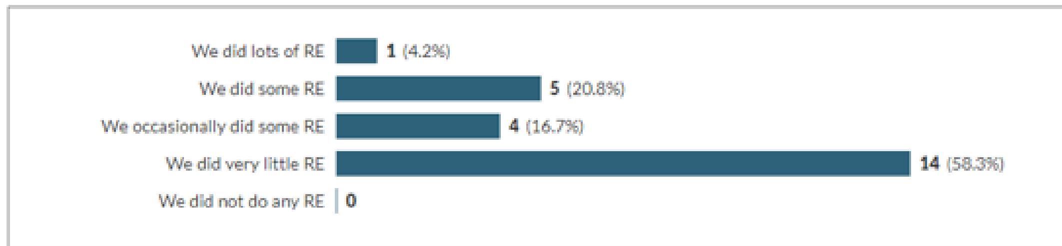


Questionnaire Two

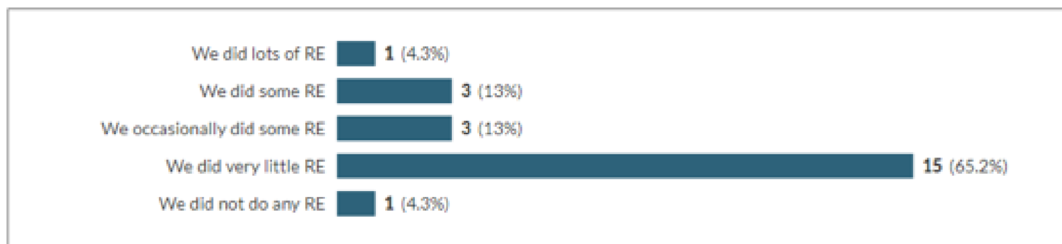


Question 5 – How much RE did you do at primary school?

Questionnaire One

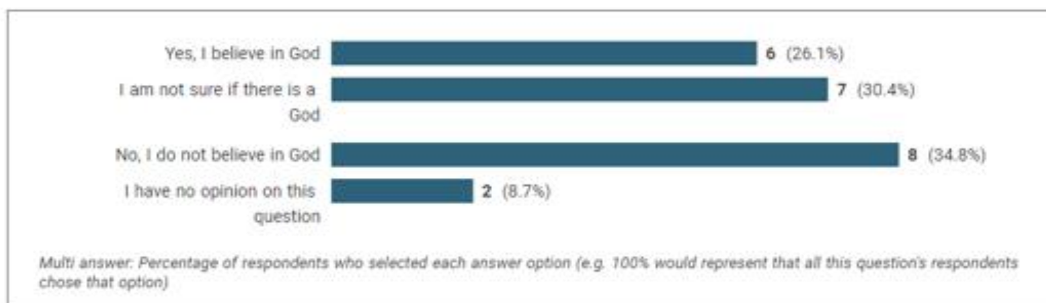


Questionnaire Two

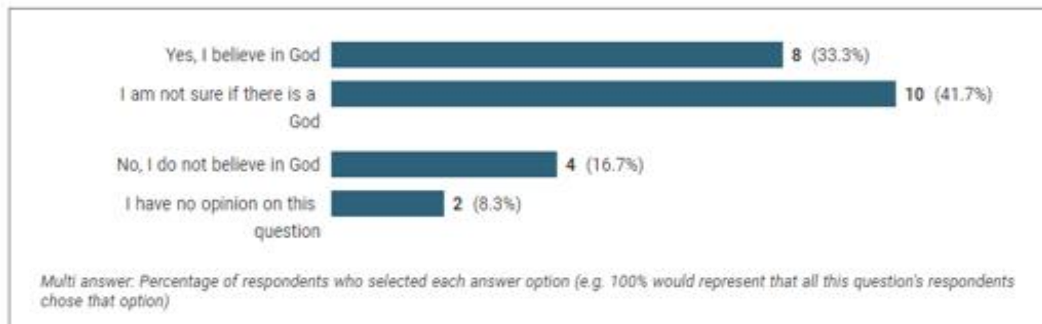


Question 7 – Do you believe in God?

Questionnaire One

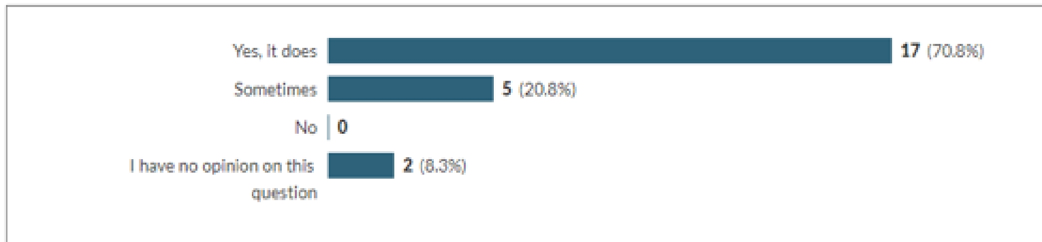


Quesionnaire Two

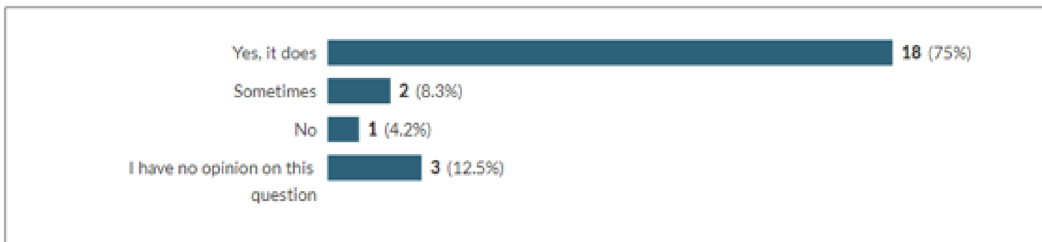


Question 10 – Does life have any meaning for you?

Questionnaire One

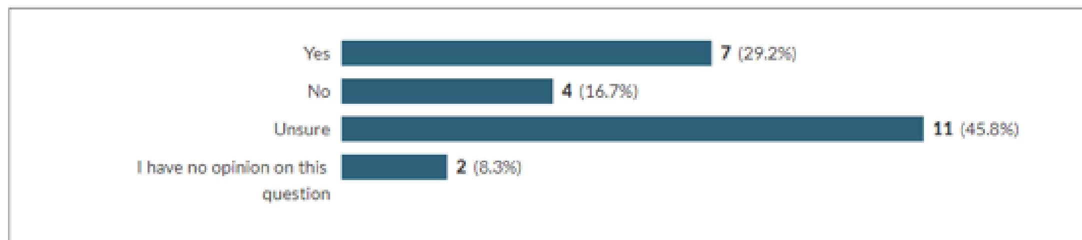


Questionnaire Two

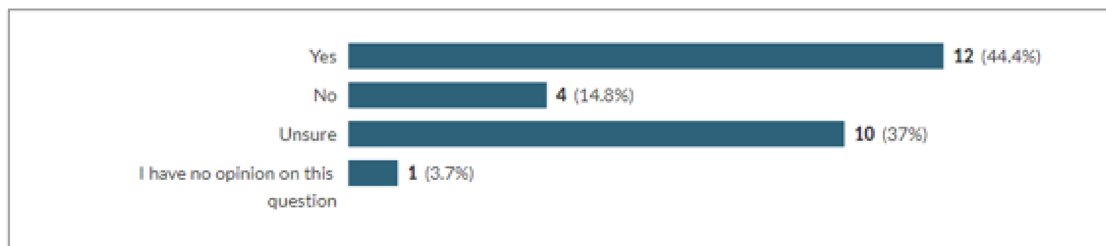


Question 11 – Do you think we will be punished for our sins (things we do wrong)?

Questionnaire One

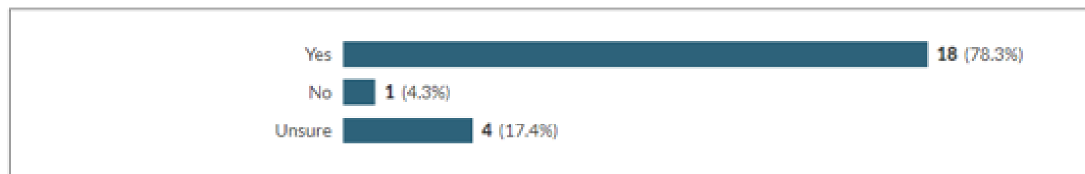


Questionnaire Two

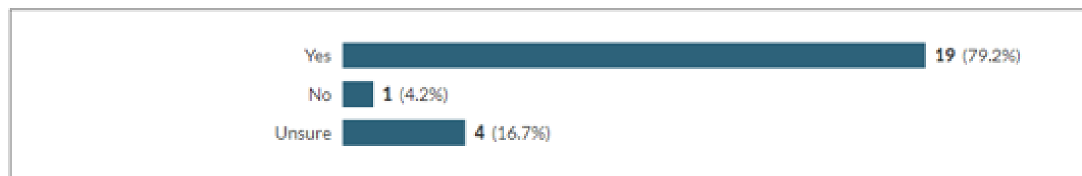


Question 12 – Do you think there is anything unique and special about you?

Questionnaire One

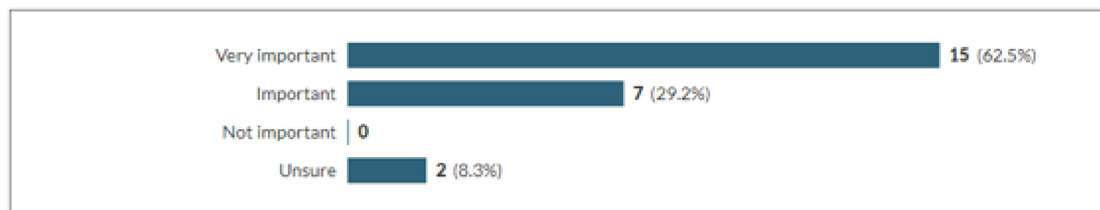


Questionnaire Two

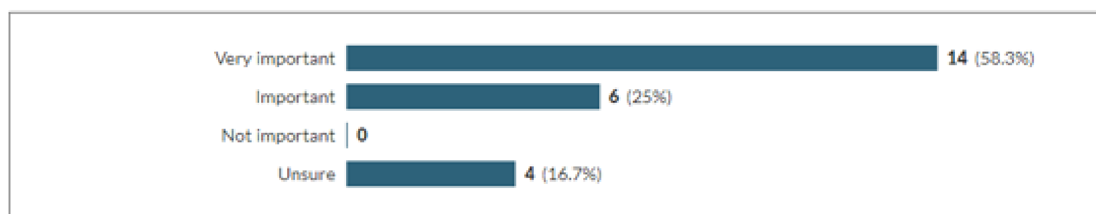


Question 13 – Is it important to you to be a good person?

Questionnaire One

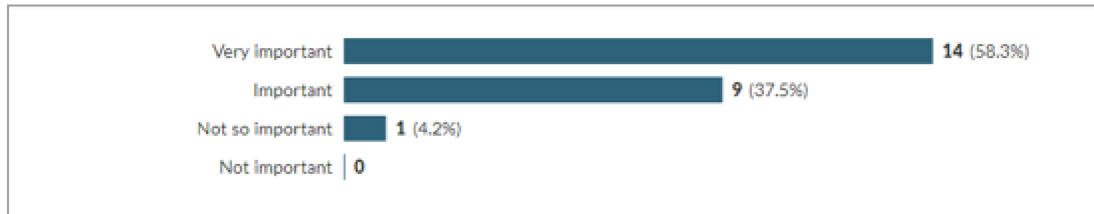


Questionnaire Two

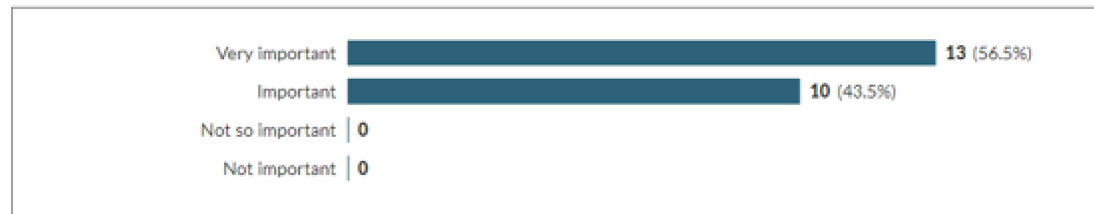


Question 14 – Is being happy important to you?

Questionnaire One

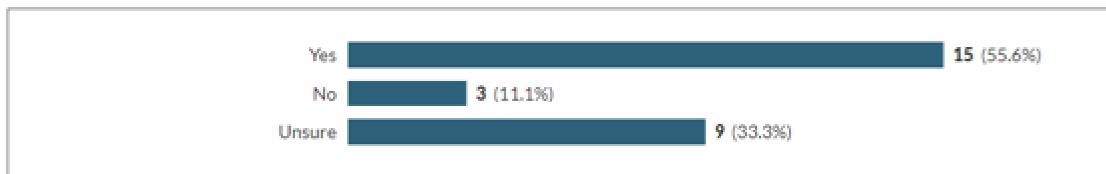


Questionnaire Two

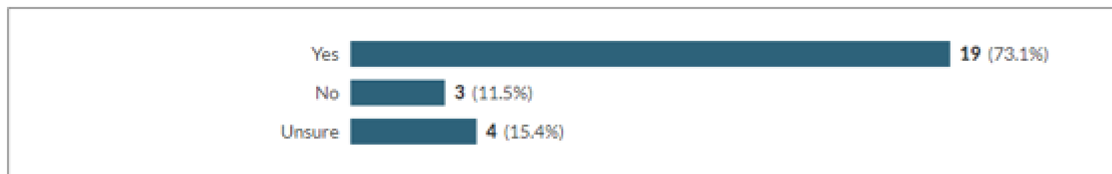


Question 15 – Do you think you are in control of your life?

Questionnaire One

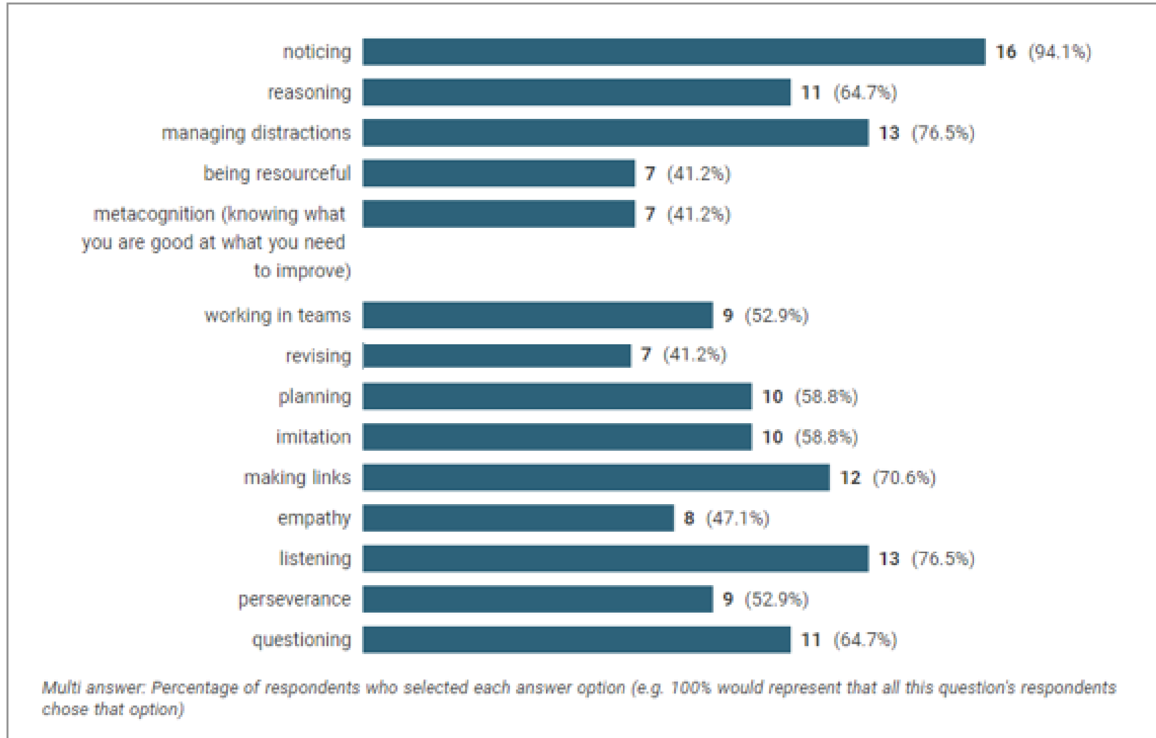


Questionnaire Two

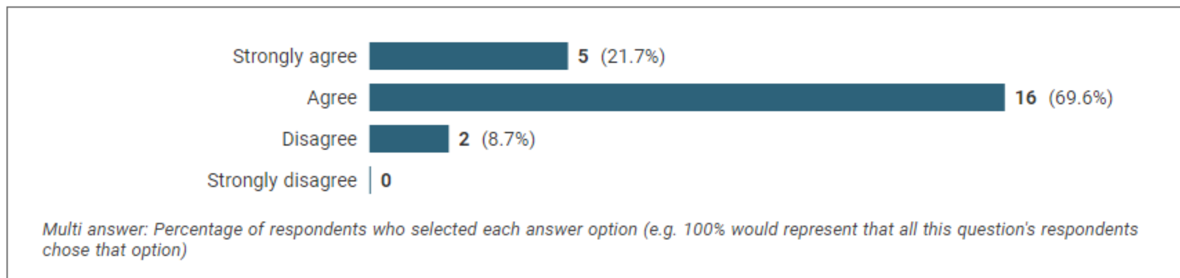


In questionnaire two a further four questions pertaining to the learning habits were added, which do not appear in the first questionnaire. Questions 17 and 19 are not included as they asked for qualitative responses.

Question 16 – Which learning habits do you think you have developed the most this year?



Question 18 - How far would you agree that exploring the different learning habits in RE has helped you to become a better RE student?



Appendix Seven: Data: Transcript of Interview One (November 28th 2016)

Interviewer: So one of the questions I asked you asked you to say which background you most associated yourself with, so one of them were different religions like Christianity etc., atheism, agnosticism, Buddhism or something else and I wanted to pick out a couple of things and (Sam) you have the first one.

Student interjection here - inaudible

Interviewer: You say you identify with atheism, alright. But then you later say you're not sure if God exists. Can you explain why you said that a bit further?

James: Right, I don't believe in God but then it's kinda weird because something happen that kinda seem like a miracle, like some think somewhere has made that happen.

Interviewer: Okay, so are you suggesting that I am atheist but occasionally I wonder?

James: Yeah

James: (Apologies for some reason here and I tell him it doesn't matter about what they say)

Interviewer: Does anyone else feel a bit the same?

Owen: I used to believe in God but I am not sure anymore because when I was little my mum used to tell me everything and I used to believe her a lot. I still believe in him but not as much for some strange reason.

Owen: It's like Santa…

Ada: Yes, like I am supposed to believe in God because of my religion but it's like from my opinion I don't. Like some things are *(inaudible)* and some things are just meant to happen eventually, no, so.

Interviewer: So it is not a miracle it's just a coincidence.

Ada: Yeah

James to Ada: Do you believe in like God or a different god?

Ada: What do you mean?

James: Like in your religion?

Ada: God cos there is…

James: Yeah…

Owen: Cos there are different Gods like Allah and different Gods…

James: Yeah…

Owen: Which one is yours?

Ada: Hmm

Inaudible exchange

Interviewer: Is Allah a different God do you think?

Students speak over each other, and, some responses are indistinct

Owen: Yeah cos they are different; the stories are different. It can't be the same one – there are different stories about it.

James: One God different names, different meanings for different people.

Owen: There might be a couple of Gods.

Interviewer: What if I told you the word Allah just means God in Arabic?

Owen: It does, Allah does mean God.

Several points made here but not all are clear.

Interviewer: A God of all religions so all these God's must be different?

Owen: No

Students speak over each other, and, some responses are indistinct

Ada: Well, one God maybe for one religion,

James: It's each opinion…

Ada:…so then maybe the other Gods will be, like, Christianity, you got Jesus and God and that goes for Christianity but then for Muslims you got Allah's *(inaudible)* so that's there God.

Interviewer: Is there any sense, do you think, that these Gods could perhaps be the same thing?

James: Yeah

Interviewer: How do you work that one?

James: Cos they all do good things?

Ada: No

Owen: If God's real then why do bad things happen?

Ada: Yeah

Owen: That's what I want to know.

Inaudible muttering

Owen: If God was supposed to be good but if God is real then what bad can happen?

Ada: Isn't it know that in most religions that God is most…

Owen: That's deep!

James: If God was real…

Ada: …powerful and so if he is, well, if God is, then why is other things happening, how can God let that happen?

Owen: To us people?

Interviewer: Okay, has anyone else got any reasons why?

James: No

Interviewer: Do we agree that actually, maybe, there is a problem here?

All: Yeah

Interviewer: that God is supposed to be all powerful that why…

Owen: If God is supposed to be so great then why....

Ada: Unless he wants us to see how good we have to become; so he will throw stuff at us to see how we react to it. Like some people are bad, they are thieves and stuff and they probably have a meaning to it, not just because they like it.

Owen: Like terrorists!

Interviewer: So there is a purpose for the evil do you think?

Owen: Yeah but I don't think…

Owen: The devil…

Laura: You have to do something to be really evil.

Ada: What's evil for….

Owen: There is God and the devil and the devil has got small bit…

James: You can't just go up to someone and say…

Interviewer: Shush… one at a time otherwise, at the end of this guys I am going to have to sit down and write all of this up, so if you're going and you're going, and you're going…ah, how am I going to write three things at once. Okay.

James: If like there was a God and war is going to happen either way for us sometimes… but 90% of the time wars are over religion. Like what is going on in Iraq, that Muslims and kinda those people around those areas and British and American who believe in different things and it’s is about which is better when neither is better.

Interviewer: So what are they arguing about… religion?

James: I think so… If you go back to WWI and II...

Interviewer: So you think WWI and WWII were about religion?

James: Well Hitler... he killed 6 million Jews

Laura: Well most of it is about disagreement

General agreement from group

Interviewer: That's interesting, carry on about disagreement.

Laura: Most things are about disagreement like errm with religions as well but it if something bad happens then this shouldn't be right. Let's sort it out.

Interviewer: Okay, if we got rid of religion would that get rid of all war and fighting?

Laura: No, I think it would create more because more people would say no I don't want this too. I don’t want my religion to not be a religion anymore.

Interviewer: So you think making religion, banning it would actually make people more religious because they want it.

Laura: Yeah

Interviewer: So what is it then that causes people to disagree then - is it religion or is it something else?

Owen: People are over religious sometimes.

James: Yeah like terrorists.

Owen: They believe that if they kill someone then they will go to the good place.

James: By eliminating other religions, they feel like they are doing their religion good.

Interviewer: Yes, I can see that. Do we think that possibly the reason why people use religion is because it’s a way of getting what they want and using religion as a means to get that such as land or money?

Owen: Greed and racism basically.

Interviewer: So you think it is racism as well?

Owen: Yes…

Silence

James: because if there was no religions then a lot of people would go like insane because a lot of people have guidance by religion.

Interviewer: So there is some good in religion then?

Jack: Yes, because a lot of the time it keeps people happy like going to church every Sunday, praying, think of the good things.

Interviewer: Is that the only good thing about religions then, it gives you a bit of guidance?

Laura: If also gives you... I am not religious... it also gives you something to trust even though it can't be real but it makes you happy being able to trust something that isn't going to tell on you or do anything like that.

Interviewer: Oh interesting... has anyone got any ideas about whether religion can be good for people?

Seth: It could be good for them to meet new people of the same religion and get to know people from other religions as well.

Interviewer: Okay...

Short interruption from students on an unrelated matter

Interviewer: Let's move on... question 7 in the interview funnily enough was about God... Sv you said here that you are not sure about God, you say... in answer to the question 7 about whether you believe in God or not... that you are not sure because this is what is believed at home... could you explain this further?

Seth: because we... my parents have started going to church now... they used to go when I was born... I think they believe in God more than I do because I have not really been to church before.

Interviewer: So, this is something you are being taught about at home you think?

Seth: Well we never really talk about God at home.. I am just not sure if He is real or not.

Interviewer: Do you go to church yourself?

Seth: Sometimes...

Interviewer: What is it like when you go?

Seth: It's like... they pray twice, sometimes three times. They do hymns. Then they do some things on special occasions... they read the bible but only on special occasions only but a lot more than usually.

Interviewer: Do you see the point in it? When you are there... do you think what is the point of this?

Seth: I think for people who are religious it means a lot to them but you are not entirely sure if you believe in God or not then it might not mean as much to you than those who do believe in God.

Interviewer: Ada, you have said you are not sure if God exists but you have also said what someone might believe about God... you say god would always have reasons for what it/he/she does. It/he/she would always choose the right option and the right paths... why did you say that?

Ada: God's job is to lead someone the right way... well that is what I believe... is to lead someone in the right direction... not to choose bad things which throw you off but to choose.. you know how like... I can't remember... there is a saying if you go down the hard path you will finally reach something good but it will be hard to get through and then there is the easy path to get to the same place but it will be...

Interviewer: What is that place?

Ada: Hard to explain it's like... my Dad used to say if you want to become something then always choose your way of becoming it. Don't do something that other people force you to do. You should go with your own ideas and you will come with stuff and things will throw you off but you will finally get there.

Interviewer: What has God got to do with this?

Ada: Well most religions believe in heaven and hell, so if you want to be in heaven you have to go through the right way and path to get to... to do the right things?

Interviewer: Do you think there is a right path?

Ada: Well... yes... I know there is a heaven and there will be a right path to get to there. Then no, because there are some sort of other religions and that sometimes doesn't make you feel that religions the right one.

Interviewer: Okay, so it makes you question whether you are right?

Ada: Yes.

Interviewer: You say you are not sure about God do you think God and heaven go together or can you believe I one and not the other?

Ada: No... I think God and heaven go together but then I don't think that you can't like you can believe in one but you can't believe in another because they both kinda lead to the same way.

Interviewer: So you said you believe in heaven, so by what you just said it kinda suggests you do believe in God? What do you think to that?

Ada: Okay no... you can kinda believe in heaven without believing in God because sometimes people who are atheists can believe in heaven and hell but sometimes they don't believe in God. Atheists won't believe in God because that is their religion but not a religion...

General laughter...

Interviewer: Why do you think then some people, even if they don't believe in God or are not sure about God, will believe in some form of afterlife?

Ada: Not quite sure...

Interviewer: They might believe in heaven or hell and heaven particularly... but not believe in God... why are these sorts of believes important for people?

Ada: Because they know there is a right and a wrong in the world and that things are wrong and things are right and that they both lead to one or another. So the right one eventually leads to heaven and the wrong one to will eventually lead you to hell.

Interviewer: Okay... Laura, do you want to say anything here...

Laura: I think heavens is gonna be when you die or it'll be what your heaven is and what your place that you want to live with for the rest of your life there and so on and so forth... but I think the main reason hell was made is cos you will die with all those regrets because people say if you have done something bad that's why you go to hell so people think. So I think hell was made because people die with regrets that they don't really want.

Interviewer: So, is heaven or hell a real place or is it something else?

Laura: I think it is just the fact that if you die you die peacefully without regrets you have a happy life but when you have die and go to hell you just die with regrets that you didn't really want and you didn't have a happy life.

Interviewer: So when you die, if you have this happy place or these regrets are these actually places? Is there something of you left?

Laura: Yes, there is something of your left in the world or you made a change or whatever you have done in the world you have done something to affect something. So when you die you don't want it to be a bad thing that you have affected, you want it to be generally a good thing.

Interviewer: But you are going to be dead... why would you care?

Laura: Because when you are dead... me and my dad go to graveyards.. its sounds weird but me and my dad go to graveyards sometimes and we just think like how did this person die or something like that. But why did they die? Did they die with regrets? I just think heaven and hell not a real place but it is for your emotions and feelings.

Interviewer: Okay...interesting... let's move on... Laura, you say you think God is fake.

Laura: Yes...

Interviewer: Right which is fine... and that the big bang makes more sense to you... why do you think the big bang is more believable?

Laura: Because it is something that's more believable to me... is because God was made but who made God and who made the person who made God etc. But one person can't make the world, even if he is like a spirit or something... that can't happen in my opinion because the big bang's made from science because science is more believable because you have more proof. But since God isn't... you don't have any proof except from the bible or something for God to be real it's not believable to me.

Interviewer: Okay... Ada...

Ada: When Laura said about who made God well that might be in only one religion because in Muslims... God is not a person and it is not something that can be made... it's something that's already there in the first place and the big bang... how can... when the earth was created how can this just happen? From my perspective how can it just be created like that.

Owen: I think that as well...

Interviewer: Okay Owen, do you have an issue with the big bang?

Owen: Yeah... I just don't believe in it at all... you wouldn't just get a bang and make the world.

Interviewer: So, let's just get this straight a minute... do you think that that big bang means you can't believe in God?

Owen: Well no but...

Interviewer: But you are going further than that and saying actually...

Ada:... but some people do believe in the big bang as well as God. I have known people who believe in God as well as big bang... they trust both.

Owen: If you believe in the big bang theory that's cool to me... I think that God made the world but if you believe in the big bang theory and God then what's God here for? What's the point of it?

Interviewer: Has anyone got any answers to that?

Silence

Interviewer: So Owen, how was the world created originally?

Owen: God... the seven days thing...

Interviewer: So literally seven days... 6 days and God rested on the 7th?

Owen: Yeah, but I just don't know how God was made but then again the big bang theory was made.

Interviewer: Does God need to be made?

James: If you think about it the seven day story is it wouldn't actually make sense because in the seven day thing it says that Adam and Eve come on but they have skipped a load of history from like cavemen, the dinosaurs. If God made the world then he skipped out a load of history. We got the cavemen, the dinosaurs now then that saying that that part of history was just made up in someone's mind. How can it be made up when there is fossils and there's proof of it but in the seven day it just skips saying there's two fully grown humans that are like humans we have now and that they put in elephants, giraffes and fish and all that stuff. But they skip out all the animals before them like the dinosaurs.

Interviewer: So you are talking about evolution basically...

James: Yes

Laura: If you think about it the world has to be created before humans come on to it like Adam and Eve... the world has to be created before suddenly people jump onto the earth.

Interviewer: Is that what science tells us?

Laura: Not really... but you can't just say these people just jumped onto earth when it isn't even created yet.

Ada: I understand James' point like because in most... in the Bible or Qur'an it says it was made over a couple of days but they do miss the dinosaurs and the cavemen and stuff and that is proved to be true.

Interviewer: Let's just think for a moment then... is it possible to believe that these stories have some different purpose?

Jack: I think he finished off the world rather than creating it.

Owen: He made us human and human made the world.

Jack: because if you look at the timeline to monkey's all the way up to a human there is a gap between having all cavemen stuff and then suddenly jumps to a human. C*annot catch next bit as too quiet...*

Interviewer: Some interesting theories...

Owen: But you say this from before... you say science knows about the big band theory but how do some of us know about that because they weren't there...the scientists.

Interviewer: Weren't where, when?

Owen: Science is the one who made the big bang theory as they say but how?

Interviewer: So you are saying they were not there as in they did not see it?

Owen: Yeah... that could be someone playing a joke and it's absolutely not what made the world.

Interviewer: To be fair... there is scientific evidence... there's red shift and background radiation and all sorts of evidence to suggest of a big bang but as you said this does not mean you don't necessarily believe in God.

Ada: Before when Owen said God made a person and that person made the world... again that's only in one or two religions. For Muslims it is not like that, God made the world, not God make a person who made the world.

Interviewer: Because of time we are going to move on... it is a shame as we could continue this discussions... we would need lots and lots of time we do not have. As we have discussed a lot of issues I was going to ask about we are now going to look at the question on whether you think you are in control of your life... James, you mention teachers and parents make decisions for you... what about when you are older would you be in control then?

James: Well, when you are older you have a bit more freedom but you still have guidance in a way because you can't be okay you can do what you want now. You have to be brought up in a way so you can guide yourself through the world.

Owen: When you are little then you are not really in control of your life until you are 18 cos once you're 18 they can't really stop you from stuff

Ada: Your freedom doesn't mean freedom that is... once after you're 18 you say you are control of your life but sometimes you'll in control of your life and you turn... you do something bad that might cause something even worse.

Interviewer: But you are still in control?

Ada: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are we ultimately though to do what we want?

Owen: No, cos of the law, the law and the police.

Jack: That doesn't stop burglars going into houses...

Owen. Well, they will get in prison won't they.

Interviewer: Seth, what do you think?

Seth: Well kind of, when you are young you make the choices, you kinda make some choices about what to do but when you are older you make all the choices.

Interruption from some silly behaviour

Interviewer: Is there any sense in which we have a destiny?

Owen: What do you mean?

Interviewer: That there is a purpose to life.

General agreement

Owen: To enjoy yourself because if you don't enjoy yourself in life then there is really no point in living... if you don't enjoy yourself you are not being fair on yourself

James: It could lead to suicide and depression...

Interviewer: What have they not enjoyed about their life?

Owen: They could get bullied or something...

James: They could get bullied... they could get cheated on... their family could split up...

Interviewer: What makes people happy then?

Owen: Friends, family... they are the people who you love.

Ada: I am not really with them on the purpose of life is to enjoy yourself because you would not really be a live if all you could do is enjoy yourself... because you would like again you wouldn't have quite as much freedom and then you would be happy all the time... but sometimes things make you upset and that is sometimes for a reason.

Interviewer: Do you think that being happy all of the time to enjoy life is actually good for us?

Owen: No, because you wouldn't understand stuff. Like if you are always happy as a child you will not understand stuff when you are older. Stuff will probably happen more when you are older you won't understand what is happening.

James: If a family member passed away you can't be happy about it. I know it's like a cartoon but Inside Out how you've got the anger, the happiness, the sadness all of those work together to form the human you are.

Ada: Yes... you need feelings, you can't just be happy all of the time because things happen, things happen for a reason and sometimes those reasons have consequences.

Laura: If you are happy all of the time there is nothing really more to your life. You just known as that person who is always happy and can't really be sad but you need more emotions to build up who you are. Not like if you are always happy, constantly 24/7, but if something bad does happen people think of you otherwise, like you're happy but something bad happened...

Interviewer: Is happiness just about family and friends?

Owen: No, it is about yourself.

Interviewer: What will make you happy about yourself?

Owen: Achieving... coming to this school...

Owen: If you do stuff that you like doing it can be spoilt what you enjoy doing, it could mean you are happy about doing that.

Interviewer: What else makes life worthwhile?

Owen: Having fun.

James: Being on the planet... because being on the planet makes others happy and others make you happy and it's kinda like a link because when you're sad people are happy and when their sad you're happy when you make them happy again. It is like a chain reaction.

Owen: When you smile at someone their most likely to smile back at you... just because they know you're happy they will smile back at you. Just don't do it on the streets in front of a stranger right near his house.

General laughter.

Ada: Being on this planet is good because you can achieve very good stuff. Some people they go to the moon and stuff and that's a really good achievement and other people they like... well authors and artists and the very well-known but sometimes we think they are very well know but sometimes inside they might not like it. They might think oh that you’re an actor you're weird and...

Interviewer: Okay... are there things that make you happy that should not make you happy do you think?

James: Yeah... it's kind of disturbing but people who are crazy enjoy to make people suffer.. it's true... their doing it because they are extremists...

Owen: Their religion.

James: Yeah but that is not because of happiness.

Owen: Yeah it is because they believe they will go to the good life afterwards.

Laura: I thought like... going back to your point about people who are famous... well you know that actor Robin Williams.... I think that is his name... but we thought he was very happy... he died... suicide but we didn't know that he had a bad life from the good life we saw.

Interviewer: What would you say was good about his life?

Laura: Because he is very well known, he had a lot of people who liked him and just being having a lot of money will make you... he had a lot of money, he had a lot of followers and he had a life that some people wish they had.

Seth: Some people money does not make them happy... it is their family which makes them happy.

Interviewer: Why do you think Robin Williams took the overdose?

James: Maybe he didn't like fame?

Seth: Maybe he didn't see his family?

Owen: People like footballers because they have obviously got something wrong with because at the minute there is that thing about footballers when they were little...

Interviewer: Do you mean the child abuse allegations?

Owen: Like people who have not done anything wrong or their bad at football or something but Wayne Rooney's getting bullied by the crowd kind of. They were calling him Shrek and stuff. They probably not enjoying playing football anymore and that people are stopping them from playing.

Interviewer: So it is about that enjoyment in life.

Owen: Yeah, but they have people who are stopping them by being mean.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewer: What Laura said about him... like some people they... some actors like doing what their job is because they earn a lot of money and some actors and some people are very happy with lots of money. But then some people they don't really care, not in a mean ways but they don't really care about the money coz that is not what they wanted as a child to achieve. Like to... probably they are better than that. They want to show they are better than that but right now all they are is an actor and they want to like increase...

Interviewer: Do you think there is a sense people find there is something missing in their life?

Owen: Yeah like if you have a wife, you lose it and you would really be low by then. Yeah, you are missing much.

Interviewer: Yes but that's a person but could there be other things, you might be seemingly popular, money and everything you could possibly want, yet he's upset... what's missing?

Laura: I think the fact that he didn't know what was behind who he was or didn't know constantly what he was doing. So he didn't know very what his life was about but when si said how he probably... some people don't care but how can people don't care so much that they could die or commit suicide because they have a family that could help them and things like that.

Interviewer: Question 13 was talking about whether you felt it was important for you to be a good person. James, you said you can lose your friends if you are not a good person. If being good dependant on others? What if you has no friends?

James: No I meant when you're a good person then you usually keep friends as in their not fake friends. If you are not a good person and you have been mean.... made people scared of you then they hand round with you because they are scared of you. If they are not friends you might bully them or something.

Ada: This could also go back to the happy question because when your happy... when your moody your quite rude to people and aggressive but when you are happy you are really cheery and stuff.

Big silence...

Interviewer: Okay let's go back to the beginning, a really interesting question - Is this it? Is there nothing else?

Owen: Heaven, hell but...

Laura: I believe it carries on going. Sometimes I believe maybe you die but you forget about your past life completely but have a new life.

James: I had a dream about that...when you die...

Owen: ...when you come back alive you forget everything... animals... I thought that animal... you die and turn into an animal in your next life... how are animals then made? What! They just can't randomly.... as we are randomly human...

Interviewer: Interesting... one of the questions, question 11 said are we being punished for our sins and bad actions? Owen, you mentioned karma. What did you mean by that?

James: As in if you do something bad then it tends to be something bad is going to happen to you, that's why about the God thing. Like if you do something good dead like helping an elderly cross the road or something then something tends to happen good to you. But if you're bad then let's say something bad happens to you.

Interviewer: What controls that then?

James: God. That's my whole do I, don't I thing with God because sometimes it seems that something is like go sit in the naughty seat. Right have a good boyfriend or something.

Interviewer: So then, I am going to ask you a question again, are you really in control of your life?

James: No

James: No, it's like a book, it's like somethings writing it, it's like someone up there is watching everyone writing a book, writing a life story.

Owen: What if there is a God for every single person and their watching over you all the time.

Ada: Yeah

Owen: Woe, that is so cool.

Laura: I was thinking when you've done something good you tend, most of the time, to get this feeling oh I have done something good and it makes you want to automatically happy but when you've done something bad you

feel guilty or you regret something or doing something bad but also when Owen said maybe every single person has a god, I used to believe that there is a god for a name like your family in a way. I used to think that when I was little but I do but I don't know because God could be real but then again in my opinion he would be....

Interviewer: Anyone got any last comments they would like to make?

James: A couple of weeks ago, what Laura said, I had this weird dream where when something passed away you forget about your complete past life but come back, start new life, new family... like have a new mum, a new dad but then that would be like first time for everything. You might have already done it but you won't remember it, It's almost like you go up, die, bits come off.

Owen: Like we could have been someone else now because people say people are born every second and die every minute, they could have been born that second, they die for the minute and are then reborn as something else.

Laura: When Owen said you could come back as an animal how can animals, that could be true, but how can animals have different personalities because when animals come back,... dogs always have different personalities, something different with every single dog, every cat is pretty much different and everything like that, every animals, has their own personality so how could it, that could be true because it could be a soul.

James: I think ancestors, I don't really believe in God but I believe in ancestors. I think past people that have died then go up to heaven, look down on you, help you through life.

Owen: What if they don't save?
Interviewer: Sorry everyone that is our time up! Thanks again for helping out.

Appendix Eight: Data: Transcript of Interview Two (July 9th 2017)

Interviewer: James I will start with you as you were not here for the second questionnaire. Would you say that over the year, doing RS, have your views have changed at all, on anything we have talked about?

James: Yes, and no. Most of them have stayed the same but something good changed in the ways, like, how I thought they would be like and how they actually are.

Interviewer: Could you given an example of that?

James: For, like, Hinduism I thought that they didn't actually need that many gods but then, because they've got loads of gods but when they were explained they all mean one thing so I guess different people want different things to them so they pray to that one god. So *inaudible...*

Interviewer: Would you say any of your personal views have changed?

James: Ah no, not really.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me what I mean by that question?

James: As in, let's say, if I didn't like Christians, I've for nothing against them, but if that's changed.

Interviewer: So you are saying those sorts of things haven't changed?

James: No, I like Christians.... I like people.

Laughter

Interviewer: Does anyone want to make a response either on their views of RE in general or personal views?

Silence

Interviewer: Okay, Laura you say in your questionnaire, you say that even though you are an atheist you still believe that when you die you go to heaven or hell... why do you believe in heaven and hell?

Laura: I think it cos, it's not how I have been brought up, but I have been brought up.... *inaudible.*... believes in spirits and the afterlife and but he isn't religious. It's like the day of the dead but not have a God, if you know what I mean? So you go to your heaven or your hell... so you can go to a place that you would really like to be... with people you would really like to be in heaven with or hell is like the place you go to that, a place that you don't like. So, I don't know, ever since I've been little I believed that but I've never believed in gods or anything like that.

I: Do you think it is possible to believe in heaven and hell and not believe in some form of God?

James: Yes, I do.

Ada: I think so because I think it's that, when someone dies, if your self dies there is like a reason behind, like what's going to be after you die, like is there going to be a heaven or a hell or is there just gonna be like... basically if your gonna like something, like a life after death basically or is it just going to be your dead and that is it... something....

Owen: No, because like, who put you in the heaven or hell because if there is no God it's not like a random man put him in heaven or hell.

James: Hmmm yes because if, just because if, you don't believe in God or stuff doesn't mean you don't believe in going to hell or heaven if you think that. In a way they are separate things because in, like the Egyptian times when they passed on to the afterlife but wasn't because, like believed in stuff that was like loads of different people that were there not actually, like, people that they thought. It's like people can't see but the Egyptian's they didn't believe in like gods that we couldn't see. If... *audible....*

Seth: You could like, it doesn't matter what you believe... you can believe in anything if you want. It's like believing in different things from different religions.

Interviewer: So, you can believe what you like, so it is all true then?

Owen: Yep, well you can believe if you're not sure you can believe this.

Interviewer: So, does it matter really whether it is true or not?

Owen: No, it's like kids with Santa and stuff they believe in him.

Owen: I believe....if I don't believe in Santa I don't get any presents!

James: If you don't believe in God and stuff then you might not get good luck

James: Maybe poor homeless people can pray to God for money or something?

Ada: Then again, it's that person's opinion so, I mean like, if they actually believe what they believe then you can't stop them from believing that and you can't stay oh you can't believe that because it is not true because, then again that is your opinion.

Interviewer: A couple of very interesting points here... how do we know something if something is true or not?

Owen: We don't - it is an ultimate question which relates to what we have been studying.

Ada: It is an ultimate question because, no one knows what, well what you believe if you think that is true and that is your opinion, so no one actually knows what is actually true it's just their opinion of what is true.

Interviewer: There was something else I wanted to ask you and I cannot remember what it was.... oh yes.... this idea that if you believe in God then he is going to help you win the lottery.

Laughter

James: No... as if.... what I mean is that you get good luck because people pray for different things, like people in Florida or Texas at the minute then if there are religious they might pray for something good to come so that they can get their home or something they have lost back. Not necessarily the lottery but I am just saying a homeless person with no money or house or anything could pray for money or pray to God to give him luck or something.

Interviewer: Do you think that if God is real that he would give everybody what they want?

James: No, because I think it says in one of the Bibles...

Laughter

James: Like the Qur'an and Bible and stuff that you have to have like good deeds and stuff. You can't just go around destroying everything, being horrible and then get everything.

Interviewer: One of the things that I noticed about a lot of the responses to this heaven and hell question was the idea of being a good person. Why is it important to be a good person if you'd like to go to heaven?

Laura: So you get put in, like, so if you are a good person then you’re being the person you always want to be or maybe be with anyone you wanted to be and then if you are bad person then, like, I don't know how you would categorise what's bad or good but if you went into hell you'd obviously have to do something bad to get into hell.

Ada: Hmmm, like, if you are not a good person then and you have done lots of bad things, then obviously you don't deserve to be in heaven because it's not... there should be like a punishment for it, not like a reward because there is no reward for being a bad person, you've just something wrong which is wrong.

Interviewer: How do you define good or bad... who or what defines good or bad?

James: Your conscience

Interviewer: What if my conscience is different to your conscience?

James: Then you have different point of views.

Interviewer: So does this come back to having different heaven and hells... does that make sense?

A general no... but no more responses

Interviewer: Okay, do we think we are good people?

Owen: Everyone has done something bad.

Owen: Everyone has done something bad but you've got a second chance but it you keep doing the same thing then you’re not.

Interviewer: Who says you have a second chance?

James: Movies... it inspires you to do great things... at the end, mainly when it says based on a true story, they always say something that mostly along the lines of it doesn't matter how bad you've done something you always get a second chance.

Interviewer: Okay, alright... can you give me an example of a movie that does that?

James: Tarzan

Interviewer: Right, okay...

Ada: I think that if you have done something wrong to someone else, like something wrong which is supposed to be right then that person forgives you, then you should learn from that, from the mistake and that if you haven't learnt from the mistake or you know the mistake you have done, but just can't be bothered to learn

from it then you do it again, then obviously you have done something on purpose which is now wrong and kinda bad.

Interviewer: Who decides then, right and wrong?

Owen: You, yourself.

Ada: Yeah

James: The law

Owen: The Queen

Interviewer: Anything else?

Owen: The government?

James: Your brain... you see anyone you don't like it's your brain that says don't go over there and hit them.

Interviewer: The issue we said earlier about conscious or brain or whatever is that what you might think is different to what I might think but the government, the law and the queen and all these other things they create these rules don't they. They say what is good or bad but ultimately what makes something good or bad?

Ada: I think personally it's themselves because some people think different views, so some people think that okay this is good but when actually other people think you should not be doing this.

Interviewer: Do you mean lots of people think the same thing? Then they decide somethings is good or something is bad because people agree?

Ada: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay, just going to move on a little bit because of time and stuff. Ada, one of the things you wrote on your questionnaire is, this is something slightly different, you said everyone is born for a reason, what reason do you think you were born for?

Ada: I think over time I realise why I was born. I think that once a person grows up they know because everyone has a talent, so that person will be grown to achieve many great things, if again if they do something good, even if you did something bad it would show the world that, that you were there for a reason again because you have shown the world what is good and what is bad, yeah so I don't know yet what I was born but I think that everyone has a talent including me and everyone else so that yeah that's the reason.

James: What you said about growing up isn't there was saying that says only good die young, so how can you do something good and be good?

Ada: Okay, so you do something young, it still works.

James: So why have you not discovered?

Slight hiatus...

Interviewer: Okay let me remind you what the question was. Everyone was born for a reason what reason were you born for?

Discussion between students... more clear what is said...

Interviewer: What do you think Seth?

Seth: If you... I think your like born for a reason, like you meant to be born, and you are just here to do something.

Owen: Everyone is born for a reason because their mum and dad decided that they wanted a child.

Interviewer: Is that the case for everybody?

Ada: No, most people aren't.

James: 40% of children being born was not planned.

Interviewer: So actually if it's not... if we are born for a reason then and it is not necessarily your parents who have decided that because it might be an accident or whatever, then who decides this sort of stuff?

Owen: The accidental parents.

Ada: No, no that not...

James: Adam and Eve

Interviewer: Okay...

Ada: Well it depends on whether you are religious or not.

James: Because they were the ever ones on this planet, and then when they, you know, did the stuff and populated the planet... people just became more and more and more and then it grew but Adam and Eve... people from different parts of the world with different religions may think different things happened to get humans to be where they are.

Interviewer: Okay, what other reasons might other religions give for why we are here?

Owen: Like evolution... wait that's science...

Interviewer: Well science is the reason we are here isn't it?

James: Yeah... like when the dinosaurs went extinct...

Interviewer: What does that tell us about why we are here then? Is there a reason?

Owen: Dinosaurs created Adam and Eve...

Ada: What?

James: There is a person who said that humans are not disposable bags, they have their use, they get out the package and they have their use but then they go.

Interviewer: What's that mean?

James: As in, like yah born, throughout your life you do what you do in your life but when you die you get put in the bin...

Owen: and recycled...

James: not literally put in a bin...

Interviewer: So does that correspond to this idea that we are born for something, that we are born for a reason?

James: Well everyone is born at certain times so I guess everyone is born for something, you just discover what another way.

Ada: Yeah and either you show the world or you show your family and friends and then the people that are generations after would follow... you could be someone's inspiration, so, I mean like that's why everyone is born for something.

Interviewer: Okay lots of interesting responses there guys. Let's move on... Seth: you say in your questionnaire that no one gets punished for their sins and that they all get a second chance...what do you mean by that?

Seth: So like, if you do something bad you have a second chance to make it better and fix what you have done.

Interviewer: Who decides that?

Seth: Maybe yourself...so if you failed a test and there was another one coming up you would try and make that one, you would make that one better.

Interviewer: Is there any sense in which there might be something controlling that?

Seth: I am not really sure... if you want to make a change you can make a change.

Interviewer: Okay and something else you said Seth as well... that life has meaning but it is about being happy. Do we all agree with that?

Laura: Yeah

Owen: Some people aren't happy.

Interviewer: Life has meaning it is all about being happy... some people are happy that's why...

James: It's not all about being happy... because if you're not being happy then why would we have different emotions instead of just happy? You cannot be happy all the time... life starts as a straight line and it does up and down.

Ada: You go through different stages in your life that sometimes are difficult so obviously you won't be happy all of the time and many people aren't happy but you can't change their emotions or their feelings about something but like cos it's their personal feelings.

Interviewer: So what is the meaning of life then? If it is not necessarily about happiness because not everyone is that doesn't mean their life has no meaning.

Owen: Everything you want to do before death.

Ada: To achieve something that as a challenge you wanted to or to show... or to make a change.

Laura: I am not really sure what the meaning of life is... I think the meaning of life is just how you deal with some things and if you are going to... not to make a difference to the world but you are going to... I don't know... it depends on how you deal with life in order to change something.

Seth: I think it's like living it to the fullest and like getting as much out of it as you can.

James: Yeah... live life to the fullest and do whatever you can do to the max... that you do something with your life...

Owen: Yeah you only live once.

Interviewer: But do you..?

James: But that is something we are discussing here if we live again.

Interviewer: If there is an afterlife does that change what the meaning of life is?

Owen: If you're an animal... you could be a human and then an animal... how are animal's like what's inside then because it could be like us.

Interviewer: What part of us?

Ada: Like the soul bit if you believe that. I believe I have a soul.

James: How do you become an animal...

Owen: You've done something bad and your punished and you become an animal.

Ada: Yeah... so like the meaning of life is not to be punished! I believe this as a Muslim I need to live a good life if I want to go to heaven.

Owen: Do you believe you will become an animal?

Ada: Nah, like I'm a Muslim we don't believe in that stuff. So overall I suppose the meaning of life for me, like when I think about it, is to be a good Muslim and I am born to do this... to worship Allah the best I can.

Owen: Allah?

Interviewer: Arabic word for God...

Owen: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: So Ada how can you like be a good Muslim?

Ada: Errm... I suppose praying... although I don't always do this... you supposed to do so five times a day... going to the Mosque... learning to read the Qur'an... eating halal food...

Interviewer: Doing the five Pillars?

Ada: Oh yeah... like so fasting once a year and going to Makkah.

James: Wow... do you do all of this?

Ada: I try to but like sometimes I do not know what I believe... my parents are religious... I am not sure sometimes.

Interviewer: Why are you not sure?

Ada: I was brought up as a Muslim... like I have had no choice as it has been my life.

Owen: I don't think that is right.

Ada: What isn't? I don't mind being a Muslim... it's my life and I suppose when I am older I will be better.

Owen: I don't think anyone should be forced into a religion. They should have a choice.

Ada: Yeah I suppose but I don't feel forced... being a Muslim is part of who I am. In the same way your religion is for you.

Laura: I think you should have a choice if you want to be religious or not otherwise it like brainwashing.

Interviewer: Okay, Laura so why are you an atheist? How did that happen?

Laura: Cos I was brought up like that.

Interviewer: So did you have a choice to be an atheist? Were you taught about other religions or views?

Laura: No cos no one is religious or anything in my family. It never comes up. I so have choice... I could become religious if I want.

Ada: What miss is getting at is you are the same as me. Like we were both brought in our views... me to believe and you to not. What is the difference really?

Seth: But not believing is right in my view... cos of science and all of that.

Ada: I believe in science and like I know that you can be a Muslim and believe in science. Not to believe like is just as much as viewpoint as believing... who knows who is actually right and like sometimes I also agree with you.

Owen: I don't believe in science... I believe the Bible.

Ada: I believe in the Qur'an but that does not stop me believing in science. Allah for me is science... how do you think it all happened? Who caused the big bang??

Interviewer: Okay everyone… I would love to continue this conversation but we are fast running out of time and need to move on to the last bit of the questionnaire.

Interviewer: When I looked at your questionnaires one of the things I asked you towards the end was about the learning habits in lessons. That's the diary we filled out and we talked about a number of them over the year. Which learning habits would you say you have developed the most?

Laura: Well isn't there preparation... I think that has helped because at the beginning of Year 7 I never really did much in getting my work books ready in my bag - my pens and pencils and that. I have learnt that I have to do that now.

Interviewer: Okay, are there any others you feel you have been pushed on and developed?

Laura: Not really. I think because I pretty much knew most of them anyway. In that I knew how to do them but not really all of them because obviously primary and secondary school are quite different. You learn things throughout the year but you do not recognise that you are doing.

Interviewer: Okay. James what about you?

James: Well you kinda drilled into our heads that we need to manage our distractions.

Interviewer: Okay, can you explain what you mean by that?

James: As in, it is good to manage distractions to get your work done. You can start getting organised and getting good test results and feel good.

Interviewer: What about you Owen - what learning habits have you developed?

Owen: questioning...

I: Why do you think you have developed that?

Owen: Because I question a lot of things more often and get involved more.

Interviewer: That's true actually. What about Ada?

Ada: Erm making links because before I would just assume one thing and now if I assume one thing I try to see if anything links towards it and expands it... so it shows a bigger side of things rather than a smaller side of things.

Interviewer: One of the other questions that is linked to this - is there any way in which the learning habits have helped you in RE?

Owen: I've got one... empathy...

Interviewer: Okay, how has that helped do you think?

Ada: Because it puts us in someone else's shoes, it makes us see from their perspective of what they see. Like you can't always stick to your opinion and side. You have to understand other people's point of views.

Interviewer: What do the others of you think? Is empathy a real key one that we developed?

Laura: I think it is definitely because when I started doing RE, it wasn't my favourite subject, because I kinda thought well if I don't believe this what is the point in everyone else in believing in it. But then I have learnt that maybe some other people can have a different opinion than me and it's kinda just stayed there now. Rather than when I came from primary to here - I thought oh what's the point everyone's got the same opinion as me because we never did RE and it was like of oh yer cool, that's my opinion. But now I think I have definitely learnt that not everybody has the same opinion as me.

Interviewer: Okay, what do you think Ada?

Ada: Erm I think I agree with Laura because at the start I would just believe in my religion and think oh no everyone else is all wrong and my aspect is correct. Then throughout the year I have realised that if you understand from someone else and forget about your opinion, just for a while, you will understand that you weren't right and other people can have opinions too.

Interviewer: James, what do you think?

James: Don't know really.

Interviewer: Seth?

Seth: I think that everybody should have their own opinion and no one should doubt it because it is there's.

Interviewer: Is there any way in which you think the learning habits help you become a better RE student?

Owen: Yes, because managing distractions. If we had not been taught that then everyone would have been crazy.

Interviewer: Isn't that the case for subjects though, don't you do this in other subjects?

Owen: No, they just like shout.

James: If we are getting out of hand they just put names on the board or like shout. They never mention the learning habits.

Laura: I think it was with you, you kinda went more in depth because other teachers they will have a go at you but you kinda went taught us what ways there are to manage distractions. Other teachers just said shut up basically.

Ada: And I think it more to do with RE than like any other subjects because in RE you have to learn about different religions and like stuff which is involved with the religions. And using that learning thing...

Laugher generally

Ada: ...learning habits helps us widen your viewpoint on other things

Interviewer: That is interesting, can you explain that further - why does it help you widen your viewpoint, what particular helps you do that?

Ada: I think like all the key words like empathy and I think they help because you explained it further and we had the books which we had to write in... the diary helped us develop the learning habits.

James: Develop resilience...

Ada: Other teachers would just give us like okay basically you are not supposed to do this or that but you were like this is why. So I think you were giving an explanation as to why we needed to.

Interviewer: Would any of you say that throughout the year that any of your views have changed or broadened? I am not suggesting you have become religious or anything but would you say you have thought about things more deeply.

Owen: Yes, I was not really not bothered about religion before.

Ada: I think that for me where it has widened is that the ultimate questions - I have thought more deeply about them. Like is there life after death and all thoughts. I think they really they show a bigger viewpoint and makes you see more deeply into it.

Laura: When I came into Year 7 I thought RE was just about religions and stuff like that. I thought that it I am not bothered. But now I realise there is more to it than that.

Interviewer: Do you think using the learning habits helped you talk about the ultimate questions?

James: Yes, because there is life after death and there are lots of different religions. Some of them might think there is and some might think there's not. So it is an ultimate question you never really know.

Interviewer: Okay but what about the learning habits? How do they fit in with this?

James: Well ...

Ada: I think it is called inferring... inferences... so from the stuff we already know which, you taught us, we can infer from that to the ultimate questions and that will be easier for us and that it how it links together.

Interviewer: Do you feel that any of your views have changed at all?

James: Yes

Laura: I don't think in personality but in the views of religions yes.

Owen: I think it has just changed what we thought about religions really, as I said I was not bothered but then, there is more stuff to it, to religion.

Interviewer: So does that make it worth learning about then?

Yes, is the general consensus

Owen: Yes, I find stuff out and so I don't say anything mean to something in that religion because if you know more stuff.

Interviewer: True.

Interviewer: What about you personally? Do you ever think yes that I kinda get that?

Owen: Yes, Buddha.

Interviewer: That's interesting, why Buddha?

Owen: Because I just do...

I: Okay… thanks for doing this… we need to finish now as we have run over time slightly.

Appendix Nine: Sample data: Student Work (Alana)

Excerpt from assessed work 'Can Buddha's teachings make us happiness?'

Referring to the question at the start, in my opinion and answer to the question title is Yes! I think this because Buddha's words are very motivational to everyone around him and after you have completed the tasks he asks you to do it will make us happy and have a much better life, with more harmony, peace and contentment for us all. For example, three things cannot be hidden for very long: the sun, the moon and, the truth (another quote from buddha). This is showing that you need to be honest to find the truth!

To conclude, I just want to point out that, my point of view might be different to others in this world, but I can't stop believing in what I think is right because of others! My answer to that question is Yes,

Appendix Ten: Sample data: Learning Diary (Stephen)

I can make -links.

To do this well I need to:

1. notice detail / listen
2. manage distractions
3. thing outside the box
4. be willing to make mistakes.

Lesson Review

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am NOT good at this **I am really good at this**

Date 4/4/17 9/10

Why your rating? I feel I can think carefully to find the fine details

Target for improvement I am not willing to make mistakes.

Date 16/5/17 9/10

Why your rating? I can now think ~~of~~ outside the box.

Target for improvement I am not willing to make mistakes.

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Appendix Eleven: Sample data: Field Notes 23/01/17

Lesson Content	**Existential Thinking**	**Learning Habits**	**Observations**
Why believe in anything? Look at a variety of ways in which the word is used – religious, non-religious. Ref UNDRC – the right to have a religious belief or not/ freedom of speech Difference between facts and opinions.	Some interesting thoughts on why people believe things – others tell them, evidence, upbringing, trust. Are all beliefs equal??? Link to respect. Mine field. Links to religious belief but also the idea of trust. What do you believe when you get in a car? Get married? Why do you believe in a football team? What are we actually saying?	Reason highlighted and previous success criteria revisited and diary ratings to set new targets. Perseverance also key when looking at difficult ideas. Alana – ref to empathy learning habit and why it is important in this topic – linked to rights.	Class attentive and enjoy discussions on belief – more confidence shown generally. Is this linked to my obsession with growth mind set?? More contributions from variety of students and not just the noisy boys. Checked diaries at the end – confidence levels are up.

Appendix Twelve: Year 7 (Mid-Term) RE Curriculum Overview: 2016-1217

Use of learning habits are in **bold**

Term 1		
	Introduction to RE	
Enquiry Questions	**Learning Habits**	**Activities**
Why RE? 1 lesson	Managing distractions Listening Metacognition	Listening game RE Ten Expectations (**links to learning habits – why important to manage distractions/listen?)** Mention '3b4ME'. Why do RE? Watch clip. What does it offer as a subject? How is it similar and different to other subjects. Do you have to be religious?
What are the 6 major religions? 3 lessons	Managing distractions Perseverance Working in teams Resourcefulness Planning	Images of different religions – do you recognises them? **Drop in learning habits.** Complete timeline Play flash card game in pairs Memory game using flash cards (perseverance) **Discuss what they need to do to work in a group well – what do they expect of each other etc**. Use TASC wheel to research one of the six major religions. Present findings to class as a ppt/play/still image with thought tracks/news program etc. Use resources boxes and computers to help – **pit stop regularly to check how well they are working/planning.**
Why are signs and symbols significant in religion?	Managing distractions	Which are signs and which symbols game (religious and non-religious examples)

1 lesson		Difference between signs and symbols with examples. Why do religions use signs and symbols? Examples. Create own symbol – emphasise that it must reflect their personality/hobbies/likes and dislikes/beliefs and values **Ask about managing distractions – have they done this well? What could they do to improve?**
What makes a place special What is worship? 2 lessons	Noticing Metacognition/ reflection	Play spot the difference (**noticing)** **Look at noticing and create success criteria (give out learning diaries)** Think/pair/share - Where/what is a special place to you? How do these places make you feel? How do you show they are special? Who lives in a place like this? Play through the keyhole game. What do they notice? **Noticing** What does worship mean? Synonyms – other words to describe it. How might they worship? Who? Why? How do they show it? Watch clips on religious worship – what do students notice, how might it feel? **Link to own ideas (reflection)** Create own special place **(reflection)** Case studies – mosque/church/gurdwara **Return to diaries – how well have they noticed? Was it easy or hard? What could they have done differently?**
Baseline assessment 2 lessons	Perseverance Metacognition (Planning)	**How to plan and persevere – success criteria (use diaries).** Pre-assessment tasks

		Set up, allow research (h/w) and then sit assessment. Introduce the exam wrapper. Metacognition
What makes a book inspirational? 2 lessons	Noticing Perseverance	Look at selection of quotations from religions/films/famous people etc. and choose the most inspirational and why? **Noticing** Key term – define inspirational (synonyms) THINK/PAIR/SHARE - consider why religious people see their writings as holy or sacred? Unpack – sacred, truth, authority, revealed **Metacognition** Case studies – Qur'an/Bible/Guru Granth Sahib Create their own book of inspirational quotes (see Youtube to create tiny books) **Recap – what have they noticed today? Have they had to show perseverance today? Why? Fill in diary**
Culture v Religion 2 lessons	Making links Noticing	Spot what is religious and what is cultural in image **(noticing)** **Look at making links and create success criteria (give out learning diaries). What does making links have to do with noticing?** Unpack key terms – religious and cultural (link to multicultural and multi-faith societies) Watch clip from St Trinian's film (beginning with all teenage subcultures) – **what do we notice?** Students to consider their own cultures. How does culture and/or religion affect a person's life? Write a story about a day out in Birmingham – show understanding of culture and religion. Swap with a partner and spot culture and religious aspects.

		How have we been making links today? Why is this important in RE? Fill in diary
Why are people religious? Lesson 1	Noticing Reasoning Making links	Look at pictures of celebrities – identify (**notice**) what they have in common? They all believe something – reps of various faiths and Humanism. Do a COP (consider all options) - Why do we think these people are religious? Ask what habits are important to use here? **What habits does this require of us?** In small groups look at some case studies of famous religious people – what they believe, why they believe it and how their beliefs affect their lives. Feedback to the class. Which one do you think could be inspirational to young people? Why? **Mention making links here.**
What is an ultimate question? 2 lessons	Reasoning & Questioning	THUNK activity **Reasoning** **Ask students – what learning habits do we need to focus on today? Looked at 'I can/I can't' sheet (hoping they spot reasoning and questioning). Fill in diaries.** Identify what is an ultimate question and what is not. Difference between an open and closed question. Why are ultimate questions important for religions? Can non-religious people be interested in ultimate questions? Look at a selection of ultimate questions – THINK/PAIR/SHARE **Metacognition** – how might we answer them? Why do people do bad things? In pairs pick an ultimate question and have a go writing an answer. **Return to diary – was reasoning easy or hard? How can we improve? Link to noticing and perseverance.**
Progress check lesson and introduction to empathy 2 lessons	Empathy Planning/ Metacognition	Complete First **Learning Review - Metacognition** Revision set for assessment – **set exam wrapper with 5 suggestions of how to revise (use at least two).** Give out knowledge organisers. **Planning/Metacognition**

		Listen to stories where people are showing good **empathy** and others where they are not. Why is empathy important? What is the difference? Is it easy or hard? How can it be developed? **Why is empathy important in RE?** (fill in diaries later) Are we any good at it? Complete assessment next lesson and feedback on **exam wrapper. Metacognition**
Term 2		
	Why do people believe in God?	
Enquiry Questions	**Learning Habits**	**Activities**
What is the difference between facts and beliefs? 1 lesson	Reasoning Revising Managing distractions Perseverance	Play – 'Stand up if you believe in …' ppt – aliens, fairies, santa, love, fairness, God, gravity, big bang etc. **Reasoning** Discuss how the words fact, belief, truth, faith, evidence are used in the above examples. How do we know what is true? Is faith only for religious people? Pick some of the ideas from the 'Stand up' game and write down why you believe/do not believe and why. Try and use terms truth, faith. **Perseverance** **Ask which habits have they used so far today? Look at 'I can/I cannot' chart. Revising/Perseverance/Reasoning???Discuss meaning and fill in diary.**
Why do people argue over the existence of God? 4 lessons	Reasoning & questioning Perseverance Revising Noticing Empathy Revising	Ask for gut reaction – Is God real? Write in books. **What learning habits are you using?** Unpack key terms – omni words etc. **Learning habits today? Fill in diary. Ensure perseverance is highlighted as ideas can be difficult. Return to in different lessons. Go round and check responses.** Play READ/COVER/REMEMBER/CHECK with partner – do they remember the words? **Link to noticing and perseverance**.

		Watch clip of various celebrities saying what they believe about the existence of God. Why do people believe in God? Why do they not? Why would people have different views? Is it okay to disagree? Link to Rights of the Child (respect but we can disagree/challenge). **Revising** Blind vote – what does the class believe about God? Student close eyes and raise their hands if their answer to a question is yes. **Metacognition** Write a paragraph – what do they believe about God? Do an OPV (other people's views) –THINK/PAIR/SHARE – **try and put yourself into someone else's shoes.** Return to gut reaction – has your view changed, is it the same? **What learning habits are you using?** Look at arguments for and against the existence of God – sort into for and against and then choose most persuasive/least persuasive for each view. **Reasoning** Why do people believe in God – look more specifically at the idea of miracles - Fabrice Muamba case. Return to gut reaction – has your view changed, is it the same? **Revising** Why do people not believe in God – return to Fabrice Muamba and look at the number of other footballers who have had cardiac arrests on the pitch – why were they not all saved? Problem of evil. Return to gut reaction – has your view changed, is it the same? **What learning habits are you using?** THINK/PAIR/SHARE (as hot seating activity or debate) – can science disprove God?

		Hot seating activity – ask for volunteers to be interviewed and/or have a class debate **Questioning/reasoning** Return to gut reaction – has your view changed, is it the same? **What learning habits are you using?** H/w task at some point – interview 5 people and ask about their beliefs about God and why. Students to create questionnaire and present results in graphs etc. Write belief in God speech – start with own point of view and then contrast with a different view. Present speeches in groups and some before whole class. **Fill in diaries. Metacognition**
What do Christians believe about God? 1 lesson	Noticing Working in a team Perseverance Reasoning	Key term quiz (discuss after – if you did not do so well what can you do differently next time? **Set a target**). Team interpretation – students look at a range of quotations from the Bible on the nature of God – to design a WANTED POSTER for God (so what are His qualities etc).**Remind them about how to work well in a group.** **What habits are we using today? What might be easy or difficult? If necessary discuss success of group work.** Have a mars bar on display - How is a mars bar like God? Why is God like a fidget spinner? (use one). Intro Trinity – ppt Unpack terms such as monotheist and incarnation. Why is God presented in three different ways? **Reasoning** THINK/PAIR/SHARE – How is Jesus also God? **Metacognition** **Fill in diaries**
What do Muslims	Noticing Making links	Have the shahadah on the board – what do Muslims believe about God? How is it similar or different to the Christian view. **How have they used their noticing and making links habits here?**

believe about God? 2 lessons	Metacognition/ reflection	Ppt look at ideas of Tawhid, monotheism and why no images. Ref back to Muhammad and his view of images. **Encourage links** back to Trinity and the idea of Jesus being God – why do Muslims not agree? Watch Youtube rap on 99 Names of Allah – ask students to notice as many as they can. Pick two to explain to the class the meaning of. **Noticing** Students create the 9 names of them – words to describe who they are as people. Reflection Look at some pictures of Islamic art – how there are no images but patterns and calligraphy – that there will be a mistake somewhere and why this is. Create a piece of calligraphy and/or Islamic art which shows names. Reflection – why similar or different are Christian and Muslim ideas of God? **Making links**
What do Hindus believe about God? Lessons 2	Noticing Making links Perseverance	Watch video of images of the Hindu gods. Guess – how many? **Noticing** **What habits are we using today? Remind them of listening and managing distractions.** PPT Introduction to Hindu gods – 1 million for each day of the year. Intro Trimurti and ask how this is similar to Christianity? Bring in the idea of Brahman. **Making links** THINK/PAIR/SHARE – are Hindus monotheists or polytheists? **Metacognition** PPT look at image of me and how I can be lots of things at the same time but am actually only one person. **Perseverance** Show Youtube clip of the blind men and the elephant.

		Inform class that many Hindus are monotheistic but Brahman takes different forms, but some believe that there are many real Gods. Emphasise that Hinduism is a very diverse religion. **Link back to the idea of perseverance if needed.** Students take some notes and do their own version of 'I am one but many'. Play top trumps game and identify some of the various forms of God and their symbols. Emphasis they need to **notice** details. Write a new story about a chosen Hindu god using the information from the top trumps cards. Complete – 'If I were a Hindu God?' What would you be like. **Reflection**
Prepare for assessment 2 lessons	Metacognition /reflection Planning Perseverance	Set up assessment tasks **-planning exercise** **Consider how we this is to be done well. What can they do to help themselves. 'I can/I cannot' chart** Do some practice writing in lesson and feedback. Give out knowledge organisers. **H/w exam wrapper** - **Metacognition**
What makes us happy? An introduction to the life and teachings of Buddha		
Enquiry Questions	**Learning Habits**	**Activities**
How can we be happy? Lessons 2	Metacognition (reflection) Making links Noticing	Play Pharrell Williams Happy song – give the students the lyrics and try to identify what he means. Watch the Youtube video – Pig of happiness. What does this tell us about happiness? **Introduce formally the idea of being reflective (part of metacognition). Identify where you have already used this habit. Was it easy./hard? See 'I can/I can't' sheet, produce success criteria and fill in diaries.**

		Look at case of the No Money man (Youtube) clip – was he happy? Can we learn anything from him? **Recap habits here – noticing/making links/empathy??** Look at idea of needs and wants – intro term materialism. THINK/PARE/SHARE – are young people too materialistic? **Metacognition** H/w choice – write a page on what makes you happy or write the ingredients and method for your very own happiness cake.
Who was the Buddha and can he tell us anything useful about happiness?	Empathy Making links Noticing Revising	Show images of the Buddha – how relevant do you think this person is for you? Give a mark out of 10 (1 not relevant – 10 very relevant). Get some feedback. **Making links** Look at same images and ask what might the person be saying about happiness? Tell the story of the Buddha and complete the sequencing task – when was he happy and when was he not and why? Revisit the idea of relevance and update mark out of 10 and say why. **Revising** **Recap empathy learning habit and ask why is this a good habit for today's lesson?** Watch Little Buddha clips on 4 sights – ask students to try and put themselves into his shoes – which bits (if any) did you **empathise most with him and what did this feel like?** THINK/PAIR/SHARE - Is any of this relevant today or is it just story about a faraway prince thousands of years ago??? **Making links and revising** Return to story – look at the point he discovers the middle way. Why had he been still unhappy until this point? Watch more of the Little Buddha film (notice the story of the musician in the boat and the lute

2 Lessons		– too tight it will break, too loose it will not play). **Managing distractions remind.** How relevant are these ideas for today? Students design their own middle way. Model first on the board. **Noticing** Return to film look at Enlightenment clip – what might Mara represent, if she is not real?. How relevant are these ideas? As humans are we distracted because of our desires, thoughts, fears etc? **Making links** Write an explanation of when Buddha was the least happy and when he was the most and why. When might you say you empathised the most with him and why? If not, why not? **Empathy, revising, reflection**
Term 3		
How is Buddha like a doctor?	Perseverance Making links Reasoning and questioning Metacognition	Put a picture of the Buddha on the board along with a doctor and ask for the link. **Emphasises the important of perseverance with the ideas. Discuss how we are going to do this well? Return to this later and fill in diaries. Go round and check responses.** PPT – on 3 poisons – image of Tibetan Wheel. Why are they poisons? Think of some modern day examples of why the poisons are bad for humans. Explain and link to the idea that it keeps the wheel spinning. Remind the students that Buddha believe in rebirth and that they believe you need good kamma. They believe in annica or non-permanence. Go back to doctor image – can anyone explain it now? **Revising** Introduce 4 Noble Truths as a visit to the doctor – students act out the conversation using a script. **Noticing** Return to doctor image – explain? **Revising**

2 lessons		THINK/PAIR/SHARE – Craving only causes pain? **Metacognition** Complete worksheet on 4 Noble Truths. THUNK – You will never be happy if you always want more. **Reasoning** Complete materialism and me task – write a day in your life and then in pairs or individually replace all of the materialist things with something less so. Discuss with a partner – could you do this? Would it make you happier? Is wanting ever a good thing?
Review lesson Lesson 1	Metacognition Revising Empathy	Knowledge quiz – key terms and ideas. Tell your partner … 1.Something you have learnt about Buddha? 2. An teaching of the Buddha's? 3.Which, if any, of his ideas make sense? (revisit the ideas of **empathy)** **Ask for feedback. Why is metacognition and revising down as the habits for this lesson? Do you agree? Add others**. **Revisit diaries and fill in – either metacognition (reflection) or revising.** Pick a problem and answer it if Buddha were an agony uncle.
What is Buddha's cure for unhappiness? 2 lessons	Working in groups Noticing Making links Revising	Recap learning so far. Look at eight-fold path (in atrium play the clues game where students have to solve the glue to find out a part of the 8-fold path). Remind class of expectations – collaboration!!! **Feedback on collaboration – how did it go?** Check answers – have they got the 8-fold path in the right order. THINK/PAIR/SHARE - What is Buddha's cure for unhappiness? **Metacognition**, **Noticing**

		Feedback the above. Do you agree? Can you think of any better ideas? Have you revised your view? Complete tasks on 5 precepts (worksheet on what they are and if they are relevant for happiness at all). Return to question - What is Buddha's cure for unhappiness? Write reflection in books. **Fill in diaries – go round and check responses**. **Metacognition**
Can mindfulness cure unhappiness? 1 lesson	Metacognition Noticing	Recap 8-fold path and focus on mindfulness – what does it mean? Have we heard of it before? Look at a number of mindfulness techniques – **(emphasise importance of managing distractions and listening – also noticing)** PPT – watching the fish (as thoughts) Being the frog (breathing in and out) Mindful colouring (focus on colouring in the image) Can mindfulness cure unhappiness? What does the class think? What is good about it? What is not so good? Blind vote – what have the students learnt about happiness? Ask a range of statements **Metacognition** **Fill in diaries.**
Assessment 3 lessons	Planning Metacognition Noticing	**Complete learning review – look at learning habits** Look at knowledge organiser – what do they know and what do they need to learn? Use highlighters. Set up assessment task, model some answers and ask students to practice writing PEEL statements.

		Set exam wrapper h/w Discuss planning etc. Feedback lesson – rewrite sections

Philosophy for Children

Enquiry Questions	Learning Habits	Activities	Resources
How well can I ask and answer existential questions? 2 lessons	Questioning and reasoning Revising Working in a group	Introduce what the students are going to do. **Ask for a list of leaning habits which will help do this well. Everyone sets themselves a personal target from the list. Use 'I can/I cannot' chart.** Show them an image of the earth from space – THINK/PAIR/SHARE **metacognition** (in groups) – what **questions** does this image make you think of? Groups to present one question they like to the class – they must explain why they like it. Why is it an existential question? What habits have helped them do this? Recap existential questions – closed and open questions etc. Class select a question from ones presented to discuss as a class. First in groups come up with an answer to the question – present ideas and discuss from there. Students to write own response to the question. **Fill out diaries – how well have they participated today? Metacognition**	

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