

Identity, community and commonality

What can Religion and Worldviews offer schools and society?

Dr Joyce Miller, FRSA. NASACE conference. May 2025

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Community cohesion

Education Bradford strategy, 2003

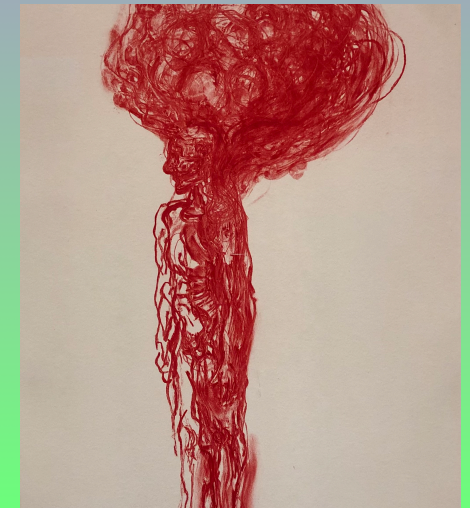
- Identity (ies)
- Community (ies)
- Intercultural navigation

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Identities

(And hyphenated identities)

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Religion
- Professional etc etc



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‘I am nothing...’

- Linda Rudge’s article from 1998
- Most pupils do not grow up in family where religion is practised formally
- What progress have we made?

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‘I am nothing’

Politically as well as religiously



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Politicisation of identity

That word — “Judaean-Christian” — so often encountered in the company of Big Serious Nouns (“heritage”, “culture”, “civilisation”, “values”) merits equal attention. It is much, and increasingly, used today, by those who want to defend it (the former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, for example, talks a great deal about it); those who argue that it is just an Islamophobic dog whistle; and those who think that the very term is meaningless.

Nick Spence, 2025

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Religion and identity

- ‘...odd presumption that the people of the world can be uniquely categorised according to some *singular and overarching* system of partitioning’
- ‘Intergroup strife can easily be fomented if credence is given to the solitarist approach to identity.’

Amartya Sen, 2006

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‘First we were Asians
Then we were Pakis
Now we’re Muslims’

Interviewee in Bradford-based research

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‘There is a naive and simplifying
view that the solution to
Islamophobia is to teach people
about Islam, so that they won’t feel
hate or resentment any longer.’

Robin Richardson. 2014. Evidence to APPG

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...a background of surging Islamophobia
with assaults rising by 73% in 2024...
Meaningful change would acknowledge
the ways British Muslims remain
disenfranchised...’

Nadeine Asbali

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Community cohesion

- Replaced focus on anti-racism and institutional racism (RRAA 2000)
- Socio-economic deprivation neglected
- Segued into the Prevent agenda

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RE's contribution to community cohesion is not just about our subject content or the skills that we help develop: it is in dealing with the existential questions to which religions and worldviews offer the answers that we can really develop young people as skilled intercultural navigators and champions of equalities, human rights and social justice.'

APPG reflections, 2015

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RE since 1988

- How far have attitudes to RE changed?
- How far has society changed?
- How far are we meeting the needs of young people to help them deal with complex world around them?
- How much has RE changed?

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Ofsted reports

2007? 2010? 2013? 2024?

- The quality of RE is still not high enough
- ...no better than satisfactory and in some cases inadequate
- The potential of RE was not being realised
- Some schools steer through... most do not

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What can R & W offer?

One

- We all have worldviews
- Focus on commonality
- Religion, society, media and politics are inextricably bound up

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What can R & W offer?

Two

- Critical thinking
- An antidote to extremism
- An antidote to generalisations and stereotyping

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What can R & W offer?

Three

- The 'other' self - 'Intrarelatational'. Willa Blythe Baker
- The other. Gert Biesta
- The other-than-human. Thomas Berry
- The more-than-human. Peter Reason

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‘The one story includes us all. We are, everyone, cousins to one another. Every being is intimately present to and immediately influencing every other being.’

Thomas Berry

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‘The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy.’

Elon Musk, 28 February 2025

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R & W's strengths

- Professionalism
- Commitment
- Support from statutory, voluntary, professional and charitable organisations

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Overarching concepts

National Entitlement 2018

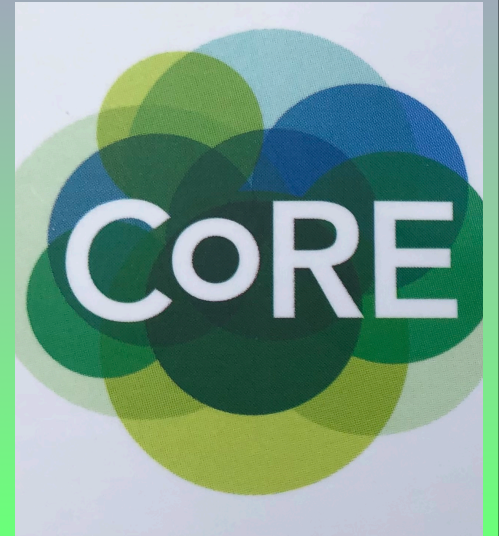
Religion

Secularity

Spirituality

Worldview

+ Morality



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‘Where is the
wisdom we
have lost in
knowledge?
Where is the
knowledge we
have lost in
information?’

T S Eliot. The Rock.

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