

This is a summary of the keynote speech by [Dr Joyce Miller](#) on Identity, community and commonality. In the session she set out to make some suggestions about what Religion and Worldviews can offer schools and society. This summary makes references to the slides that accompanied the talk, so it will be useful to look at them alongside this text.

Joyce introduced the topic by considering some of the things that give people a sense of identity and community – such as football (Slide 2), and other sports; while they help to create social cohesion, anyone not part of that community, may feel excluded, no matter how inclusive people try to be. She identified the need to talk about identities and communities in the plural (slides 3 & 4) and for pupils to learn the skill of intercultural navigation, becoming able to work their way through a range of different cultures, identities and communities. Each person incorporates a range of identities and the expression of many of these raises controversies.

As far back as 1998, Linda Rudge wrote about those who struggle to find an identity in ‘I am nothing.... Does it matter?’ (slide 5). Joyce Miller raised the question as to whether we had made progress for those pupils who do not see themselves as holding a recognised worldview or special characteristics. Who do the non-ethnic, non-religious identify with, especially if they have no political affiliation and feel disempowered? (slide 6). The politicisation of identity has contributed to a change in the use of language (Slides 7 & 9). Identity is increasingly recognised as complex and encompasses the whole person. (Slide 8)

Controversially, Joyce suggested that teaching about a topic does not necessarily solve a problem (slide 10). She pointed to a reported rise in racist incidents during and following Black History month and the fact that schools have been teaching about Islam (and other religious worldviews) since 1988 but there is still Islamophobia (Slide 11). These challenges need to be looked at in their wider context as they often more are about power, enfranchisement and socio-economic deprivation and not just religion or race. They are therefore not JUST about RE but rather a whole school and society matter. (Slides 12 & 13)

Having set the context, Joyce turned more specifically to RE, then subject which explores what it means to be human, to be good, to do the right things, to make community better and to raise questions about the sanctity of human life. (Slide 14)

Religious Education, as evidenced by Ofsted, remains under resourced and under respected (Slide 15). Joyce’s view (slide 16) is that all have worldviews and there should be a focus on identifying and exploring commonality in shared experiences of religion, society, media and politics. RE and Worldviews is a subject where pupils can learn to think critically and to question and challenge authority. These are skills which can help to provide an antidote to generalisations and extremism. (Slide 17)

Religious Education is also a subject where pupils can begin to see and dialogue with their interior self. When pupils realise that each person has this internal self, they will develop more respect seeing others also as individuals. This knowledge can also take pupils beyond the human, demonstrating ways to relate to the natural and the spiritual worlds, however that is understood. (Slide 18) There needs to be a recognition that everything we do and think and say affects others. Humanity needs empathy – and this is what RE is good at encouraging.

(Slides 19 & 20). The strength of RE and of SACREs lies in the professionalism, commitment and support of the community (Slide 21).

Since Joyce's involvement with the Commission on Religious Education (Slide 22) her thinking has developed and there may now be five strands that could underpin a successful RE syllabus: **Religion, Secularity, Spirituality, Worldview, and Morality**. To summarise Joce reminded us of the ability of RE to share the best of human wisdom over millennia, finishing with a quotation from TS Elliot (slide 23):

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge and where is the knowledge we have lost in information?