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Title

RE-Imagining an Image: A participatory study exploring monologic and dialogic approaches in Primary RE.

Abstract

The current monologic approach to teaching and learning in the UK is problematic in Primary RE, where transmission of unchanging ideas can perpetuate stereotypes and prejudice. By its nature, subject knowledge in RE is subjective and can be contentious. Set in the context of Initial Teacher Education, a participatory action research project invited student teachers to reimagine an image of an RE teacher (figure 1), which had colonial connotations. The reimagined image challenged the concept of the teacher as impartial expert. This demonstrated that a dialogic approach based on Freire's liberatory theory could be more appropriate.

Figure 1: The image of an explorer, representing how to teach RE (Pett, 2024). © The Religious Education Council of England and Wales. Used with permission.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Problem

The purpose of this small-scale investigation was to critically analyse an image (figure 1). I wanted to challenge and improve my own practice by exploring with student teachers how to be effective RE teachers and find whether a focus group might develop conscientisation through reflective and active praxis.

A recent subject report 'Deep and Meaningful?' (Ofsted, 2024), problematises the lack of secure religion and worldviews knowledge, and recommends stronger teacher subject knowledge for student teachers during their training in RE. An earlier report stated that RE is 'generally of poor quality' (Ofsted, 2023). The approach to teaching the 'big six' religions is critiqued, and a religion and worldviews approach is recommended, to be taught by an impartial expert teacher.

This project explores the assumption that an impartial expert teacher with strong subject knowledge will be the solution to a lack of 'deep and meaningful RE' in England. The colonial overtones of the monologic approach to teaching are explored, and the concept of subject knowledge as perpetuating identity stereotypes is considered through a Freirean liberatory theory lens, using topical literature to synthesise with the aims of RE.

Decolonisation has become an important focus in universities since the Rhodes Must Fall (2005) movement (Joseph- Salisbury and Connelly, 2021). As a subject leader for Religion and Worldviews education (RE) in Initial Teacher Education at a North-West university, I wanted to ensure that the way I prepare future teachers to teach RE is inclusive, promotes social justice and contributes to decolonisation.

Monologic and Dialogic approaches in RE

Freire's liberatory theory (1970) resonated with me. When I observed RE lessons taught by student teachers, I noticed that Freire's banking concept of education whereby the teacher is seen as the expert who 'deposits' knowledge in the minds of students who are ignorant, passive receptacles waiting to be 'filled' (1970, p. 45) was commonplace. I use the term 'monologic approach,' which is defined as transmission of unchanging ideas (Bakhtin, 1986). The contrast of this approach with Freire's dialogic approach as part of his liberatory theory, led me to begin to explore literature around the current climate of teacher education. This is developed in chapter 2.

Freire's liberatory theory promotes dialogue as a form of emancipation from the oppressive monologic approach to education. The Greek prefix 'dia' is equivalent to the Latin 'trans', a, 'shift in

thought' (UNESCO, 2013, p.14). Teaching and learning should be a constantly renewing thinking process, with an acceptance that knowledge is contested and may change (Castelli, 2018; Wegerif, 2010; Freire, 1970, Dewey, 1916). This can be contrasted with the monologic approach to learning, where there is a correct answer that needs to be remembered (Bakhtin, 1984). The monologic approach can be seen as 'necrophilic (death-loving)' as distinct from 'biophilic (life- loving)', (Freire, 1984, p. 526).

To promote a more dialogic approach, the Religious Education Council (REC) published a draft National Content Standard (2024) which depicts an explorer (white, male) with a backpack representing multidisciplinary tools such as scriptural interpretation (figure 1). Initially, I liked the image, as it emphasises the 'forms of knowledge' which are still neglected in Primary RE (Ofsted, 2021). However, it soon became clear from introducing this image to student teachers that an 'explorer' has problematic colonial overtones. Additionally, rather than promoting dialogue, the image of an individual collecting knowledge may inadvertently promote the monologic discourse.

I realised how important a new image could be in ITE. There have been calls for better RE training in ITE (Ofsted 2024), and decolonisation approaches to RE (Esau, 2021). From reflections in my journal, I began to think about the impact of the monologic approach to training teachers of RE. I wondered if the reason that RE was often taught 'superficially' (Ofsted, 2021; Ofsted 2024), was related to a lack of confidence in teacher subject knowledge (NATRE, 2018), or if it was a deeper problem that was rooted in a neoliberal, performative discourse which is stifling freedom of thought in education (Biesta 2020; Apple 2006; Dewey, 1916). This can be summed up by a Latin American elite who rejected the concept of an educational system which would 'awaken the potential of the masses' and result in a situation where he would 'have to listen to them'. (Freire, 1983 p.529).

The purpose of RE

Polarisation in our society, and issues such as immigration and Islamophobia have seen a rise in racist and religious hate crimes, with a 20 per cent rise since January 2023 (CPS, 2024). RE is considered a subject which can lead to social cohesion and religious literacy (Chater, 2018), yet it is not reaching its potential (Ofsted, 2013; 2024). Teachers are required to encourage pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally (DfE, 2013), yet must report them if they show signs of extremism (DfE, 2019). The monologic approach permeates the education system with a simplistic view of the way children learn. This approach therefore avoids political and religious controversy. However, it also means that pupils are not given time to be 'awake', to ask difficult questions or be listened to. This is considered further in chapter 2.

I was interested to explore whether my interpretation of figure 1 as a monologic, colonial approach to teaching RE was shared by the student teachers. I wanted to hear from them and work alongside them to create an image which could represent the social aspects of learning in RE from a liberatory theory approach with a focus on dialogue.

The research questions were developed through the process of reading for the literature review as detailed in Chapter 2.

Research Questions

1. **How do student teachers engage with the current image for teaching RE?**
2. **How might a critical reflection support participants to respond to the current image?**
3. **To what extent might participating in a focus group support the student teachers to develop their critical reflection in praxis?**

Chapter 2: Literature review

Library search

My aim in this literature review was to make sense of the findings of different studies to construct a holistic picture of the field of Primary RE in Initial Teacher Education. I recognise that may well reflect my own subjectivity (Lewis-Beck et al, 2004). I exist within a political standpoint, and I am not neutral. However, I have been transparent in my positionality, and tried to reflect the current climate accurately.

To find relevant articles, I primarily used the Open University library, using the search tool. I searched for terms such as 'religious literacy'; 'liberatory pedagogy in RE'; 'religious education in initial teacher education'; 'dialogic discourse'; 'monologic discourse'; 'culture circles in initial teacher education'; 'subject knowledge in RE'; 'liberatory pedagogy'; 'emancipatory education'; 'epistemic justice' and 'decolonisation in RE'. I kept a list and summary of the articles and journals I read in an annotated bibliography. Added to this, I used a range of topical literature which related specifically to RE, and often found relevant literature by using the reference list from a key text. I found this a helpful way to follow a train of thought and find new useful insights.

Another search I used was the dictionary tool on the Open University library. This was an effective way of ensuring that I fully understood a concept and helped to clarify my ontological positionality.

Critical theory in teacher education

As a teacher educator, I wanted to explore the field of ITE to see how a monologic approach has developed. The core content framework (CCF), (DfE 2019) informs my curriculum. Accreditation and the struggle for control from the New Right in ITE has been going on in England since the 1980s (Ellis, 2024). In 2019 the CCF was introduced, which is the 'minimum entitlement' for student teachers and claims to represent the best evidence for a teacher training programme.

However, criticism of the CCF has been widespread, particularly due to the narrowly defined understanding of the learning process, which does not consider the social aspect of learning (Wood and Quickfall 2024; Turvey, 2024; Spendlove, 2024). The learning theories that are promoted are based on cognitive science, the pupil as an individual learner (Zimmerman, 2002; Rosenshine, 2012) and the role of the teacher as 'expert' (a term used 107 times in the CCF). Turvey argues that there is an essentialist philosophy of education which underpins the CCF, providing a basis for the oversimplified definition of learning. This creates an illusion that it is beyond critique (Turvey, 2024, p.119).

Social contexts of learning are almost entirely absent in the CCF and instead there is an over-reliance on memorisation (Turvey et al, 2019). Student teachers are being taught that learning is an individual, 'in the head' skills-based approach (Luke, 2012). They are at risk of being taught that learning is just total recall (Turvey et al, 2019). 'Memory' or 'remember' is mentioned in six of the nine points summarising how pupils learn. Student teachers are required to 'learn that', pupils learn complex ideas by memorising key facts which come from the teacher, or the 'expert colleagues' (DfE, 2019, p.11). The CCF goes on to say that long-term memory 'can be considered as a store of knowledge'. Pupils should be required to 'retrieve information from their memory… to strengthen recall' (DfE, 2019, p.11). These examples show that learning is equated to remembering in the curriculum for teacher educators, thereby influencing the discourse of education.

Apple's description of neoliberalism as tighter control through centralised curricula (Apple, 2006, p.21) resonates with the recent changes in ITE (Ellis 2024). Apple notes that the aim of neoliberalism is to stop people perceiving themselves as part of collective groups, as this is not good for economic progress (2006, p.23). This individualised focus of the curriculum can also be compared with Hirsch's core knowledge, which has become closely associated with instructional approaches to pedagogy, advocating memorisation and quizzing (Willingham, 2009; Hirsch 1987). These pedagogies are promoted in the CCF.

Getting better at RE means that pupils should 'know more and remember more' (Ofsted, 2021). Equating remembering to learning is problematic. To be authentic, education needs to be democratised, to avoid pseudo-participation (Biesta, 2010; Friere 1970), in which the outcomes are already set and controlled by the teacher. Wegerif (2010) calls this 'Cumulative Talk', where pupils aim to identify with the group identity, rather than to consider their own position. Instead, teachers need to model and develop dialogic behaviour, where pupils can identify with the process of dialogue and ideal of truth, generating new ideas and insights, leading to creative thinking. He calls this 'Exploratory Talk'. For this to happen, a profound change in teacher education is needed (Wegerif, 2010, p.23).

Current approaches to teaching RE

There is a lack of agreement in RE over the content and aims of the subject. This is partly because it is not on the national curriculum despite being statutory (DfE, 2013). The type of school and local syllabus determines the form and structure of RE, which often leads to confusion. Legislative change is continuously called for (Ofsted 2024; REC 2023; Chater, 2018; CORE, 2018;). However, there are clear calls for dialogic teaching in RE (Orchard and Bowen, 2024). In fact, the image (figure 1),

comes from a draft curriculum resource from the Religious Education Council (REC), who developed a new National Content Standard (Pett, 2024), which aims to reshape the subject using a 'religion and worldviews approach'. This closely ties in with a dialogic approach, as it:

'Moves away from a focus on gathering information about the 'world religions' towards gaining an understanding of how worldviews work in human experience, including pupils' own' (Pett, 2024, p. 11).

It is interesting that Pett uses the term 'gathering information' in this derogatory way, as the image he produced for the draft curriculum is of an explorer with a backpack (figure 1). This suggests that gathering information is the aim of the explorer, which is the very image he did not want to promote. 'Gathering information' could be equated to the monologic approach to RE, where information about a religious or non-religious worldview is transmitted and acquired.

<u>The problem of neutrality</u>

A narrow conception of truth leads to a rhetoric of neutrality in RE teaching, resulting in either Christian or secular confessionalism (Wright, 2003, p.287). This means that one worldview is positioned over all others. Neutrality can be defined as concealing and ignoring personal beliefs (Jackson and Everington, 2017). Repressing the truth that we all hold a worldview, whether religious or not, can lead to silencing of non-dominant worldviews. This results in an unquestioning pedagogy of rote memorisation and regurgitation (Demirel and Wright, 2019). Schemes of work treat religions and worldviews as reductive, essentialist units (Kueh, 2018), with knowledge organisers and word banks. The pupils acquire substantive facts but lack a deeper understanding of a worldview as diverse perspectives within traditions are not acknowledged or explored (Thobani, 2010). Further, if pupils are learning about an 'expert' teachers' interpretation of a religion or worldview, identity prejudice will be perpetuated (Beauchamp, 2023) leading to epistemic injustice (Stones and Fraser-Pearce, 2022). Religions are complex and diverse, and when simplified, it is common to represent the typical member of a religion (Fraser, 2008; Gutierrez and Correa-Chavez, 2006), thereby transmitting identity prejudice (Beauchamp, 2023). This issue is termed epistemic injustice, defined as being wronged in one's capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2008, p.69).

Neutrality has been largely rejected by the RE community (Downe, 2021), and this ties in with Freire, who rejected what he called the intensely colonial traditional church, contrasting it with the prophetic church, which thinks critically and therefore cannot think of itself as neutral. He saw neutrality as a myth which oppresses (Freire, 1984).

<u>Preferred approaches</u>

A popular method of teaching RE is from a hermeneutical, interpretive approach, where the teacher's expertise is combined with the life worlds of the pupils resulting in active, dialogical learning opportunities, from an impartial teaching stance (Jackson and Everington 2017). Research points to the need for good quality initial teacher education, to develop an impartial approach to teaching alongside a sound knowledge and understanding of religion.

However, impartiality is equated with neutrality by Freire. Freire states that impartiality is a myth, leading to other myths, that is the inferiority of other people (1984). A definition of impartiality is teaching without discrimination, and without any coercive aims to persuade anyone else to adopt your views. It requires a safe space, as well as a direct teaching approach (Jackson and Everington, 2017). Yet Freire states that impartiality is a myth.

It is true that this impartial approach to teaching is challenging and not always realised (Ofsted, 2024; Franken and Loobuyck, 2016). It requires teachers to be self-aware of their worldview. An example of non-impartiality would be the anti-religious teacher who rejects or mocks those who hold a religion. Another would be the religious person who teaches that religion is a good thing (Jackson and Everington, 2017). However, there are problems with this stance. Keddie et al (2019) found that schools in Australia did not 'do religion,' and claimed impartiality. This meant that Muslim girls were prevented from debating truth claims of Islam, yet the dominant Christian culture was represented in the festivals and calendar. In Germany, teachers are required to be neutral. This requirement was challenged when a teacher refused to remove her hijab. Contrastingly, groups which belonged to the privileged hegemony were allowed to wear a crucifix (Sinclair, 2013). Luby (2020) considers the secular to be neutral.   These instances reveal that claims to impartiality and neutrality are problematic. Neutrality can inadvertently reinforce the 'White – Anglo Saxon norm' (Daddow et al, 2019, p.1175), which leads to oppression and silencing (Keddie et al, 2019; Picower, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Silencing is a theme picked up by hooks, (1994), who notes that students do not speak when they do not feel safe 'in what appears to be a neutral setting' (p.39). Subject knowledge that is not truly representative of students' life worlds (Moll et al, 1992) or of historical and cultural context will create a classroom where pupils do not feel they belong, and therefore do not feel safe. Additionally, if the truth of a religious belief is simplified, then misconceptions and generalisations occur, which is problematic if the teacher claims to be an impartial expert. Often, the 'other' is represented as a single, homogenised identity (Fraser, 2008; Gutierrez and Correa-Chavez, 2006).

For some student teachers, the classroom persona required of them may feel contradictory to their personal beliefs, especially in the context of the Prevent agenda (Farrell and Lander 2019). This can be explored in the statutory requirements of teachers' standards (DfE, 2013), which requires teachers to promote Fundamental British Values (FBV) through Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC). This positions teachers as the instruments of surveillance, promoting a culture of unease for Muslim teachers and contradicts the calls for impartiality (Farrell and Lander, 2019).

Another approach observed in Primary RE is the constructivist approach, which promotes opportunities to improve cognitive reasoning and construct pupil-centred meanings of truth. This non-knowledge-based approach leads to a lack of intellectual rigour (Kueh, 2018). It effectively discredits the ontological reality of religious or spiritual phenomena and the historical and cultural context which is required to fully understand the truth claims posed (Demirel and Wright, 2019). This results in an understanding of a worldview which is not adequately supported by theology, philosophy or ethnography. Although it is more of a dialogic approach, it is not academically rigorous or multidisciplinary. A recent report from Ofsted confirmed these findings from the literature, stating that there a few opportunities for 'deep and meaningful' learning in RE, and pupils are often confused (Ofsted 2024).

Whitworth (2020) researched with student teachers in ITE and found that they expected to be given parcels of substantive knowledge to pass on to their pupils in RE. This can be termed the essentialist approach (Kueh, 2018), where the teacher regurgitates 'facts' and is seen as the expert (DfE, 2019). Whitworth (2020) engaged in discussions which revealed to her student teachers through their own diverse experiences of religious and non-religious beliefs that subject knowledge requires more than substantive knowledge. Soules and Jafralie (2021) concur with this, stating that teachers need more than a strong grasp of content knowledge (p.38).

According to Freire, true dialogue cannot exist unless participants engage in the principles of love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking (1970). Dialogue was seen by Freire as a central concept of the conversation around educational reform. It is more than a simple interaction. Wright (2003) sums this up under the term critical religious education. He rejects the traditionalist confessional approach of inculcation and the vacuous approach of constructive pedagogies which encourage creativity and freedom without 'forms of knowledge to be critical, creative and autonomous with' (p.280). He calls for religious and non-religious understanding of truth to become 'simultaneously academic and personal' (p. 284). This approach relates to my ontological position, which would be helpful to explore here.

Ontological position

My aim as an RE teacher is to engage critically with truth claims, to gain through praxis 'a new knowledge of reality' (Freire, 1984 p. 543). This requires a fundamental interest in ultimate reality, regardless of our ability to perceive it (Wright, 2003). Although I accept that knowledge is socially constructed, it does not follow that ultimate truth depends on our construction of it (Crossley, 2005). Truth exists independently of humankind, and it is part of our purpose to seek this truth. To do this, truth questions must be approached with an open mind rather than the 'closed horizon' of a confessional approach, (Wright, 2003, p.286). In other words, the answer to the question of ultimate truth is 'fundamentally ambiguous' (Wright, 2003, p.286), and requires a recognition that there may be unanswerable questions or contradictory answers (Freire, 1984).

This means that the concept of an 'expert teacher' (DfE, 2019) or an 'explorer' (figure 1) is inappropriate in the ontology of critical realism, as it represents a monologic approach to teaching, assuming that universal truth claims can be made to accurately represent the world (Barker, 2004; Grix, 2002). Figure 1 reflects a colonial approach to teaching RE, teaching from a belief that truth can be explained or controlled (Allison and Pomeroy 2000). It reflects an elitist view, which strengthens the myth of neutrality, from which grows other myths: 'the inferiority of other people' (Freire, 1984, p.525). Teaching RE from a critical realist stance requires an increased awareness of the other and a recognition that everyone has something of value to contribute to the search for truth (Jarvis, 2021). To reach this critical stance requires radical change, which cannot happen through 'lectures or eloquent sermons' but through action and reflection (Freire, 1984, p. 526).

I wanted to gain knowledge of the student teachers' life worlds and their interpretations of figure 1. From this aim research question one emerged:

How do student teachers engage with the current image for teaching RE?

I am aware that student teachers cannot change what they do not see (Picower, 2013), which leads to the need for time in their training to reconcile personal beliefs with professional responsibilities. Critically and actively reflecting in a group using dialogic approaches begins the process of conscientisation.

Conscientisation

Freire viewed education as a means of liberation. Its purpose is to help people move from one form of knowing; 'doxa' which translates as unquestioning beliefs and opinions (Crossley, 2005), to a critical stance; where one probes the ambience of reality and tries to know (Freire, 1970, p.3). Freire

calls this problem-posing education, which is the opposite of the monologic approach and regards dialogue as indispensable to unveil reality (Freire, 2002, p.366). The relationship of the teacher and student must not be domination, but rather participatory (Biesta, 2010; Klafki, 1995; Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1916). The educational goal of deposit-making must be replaced with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world (Freire, 2002, p.366). This relates to one of the purposes of RE, to find answers to questions about the meaning of life (REC, 2023; Wintersgill, 2018). This purpose cannot be fulfilled through a monologic approach to ITE where student teachers are encouraged to view themselves as the expert.

Supporting student teachers to consider how they view the 'other' (Scanlan, 2022; Rix and Paige-Smith, 2011; Picower, 2009) and providing space for intersubjectivity and reciprocal active dialogue (Luke, 2012; Freire, 1984) is needed in ITE. The praxis by which conscientisation is developed requires both action and reflection (Glass 2001; Freire, 1984). The starting point that student teachers hold may be a position of cultural imperialism, where the experience and culture of dominant groups is held as the norm (Ranieri, 2022, p.15). Added to this, viewing the 'other' may not just be from a position of charity or deficit, but may also be from a position of hate or suspicion (Scanlan, 2022). Reflecting on feelings about teaching another worldview or religion is necessary to become conscious of how one thinks (Freire, 1974), being vulnerable in the presence of the other (Roebben, 2012). This is even more important in the current polarised political climate (Scanlan, 2022). Mezirow (2009) emphasises the importance of critical reflection on assumptions in adult education. He recommends a transformational learning approach, providing opportunities for identity stereotypes (Beauchamp, 2021) to be challenged and transformed through dialogue.

Without opportunities for student teachers to become aware of their positionality and identity stereotypes, there is a danger that they believe they are experts in RE, providing them with epistemic power (Stones and Fraser Pearce, 2022, p.369), which may result in other worldviews being silenced. This leads into research question two:

How might a critical reflection support participants to respond to the current image?

The aim of this research question was to involve the student teachers as joint participants in creating a new image, to support how to teach RE. Having problematised figure 1 as colonial and monologic, I explored the literature to see if other ways of understanding subject knowledge in RE could help to redress the colonial past (Esau, 2021, p.60).

Subject knowledge in RE

In figure 2 I have set out the various ways in which knowledge in RE is explained. Knowledge is widely believed to be threefold and interconnected in RE (Pett, 2024; Ofsted, 2021; Biesta, 2010). Despite this, the language from the CCF (DfE, 2019) permeates RE inspections. Pupils are expected to know more and remember more in RE (Ofsted 2021). A key recommendation from Ofsted is to improve student teachers' subject knowledge, as pupils' learning is superficial (Ofsted, 2024). The focus on successful learning is on remembering substantive knowledge. However, deep and meaningful learning in RE has not improved since 2013 (Ofsted, 2024). This suggests that learning content alone is not sufficient. This calls for an interrogation of educational theory underpinning religious education (Biesta and Hannam 2021).

Forms of Knowledge in RE (Ofsted 2021)	National content standard (draft) (Pett, 2024)	Functions of Education (Biesta 2010; 2015)	Domains of Education (Biesta 2020)	Outcomes of Education (Hannam et al, 2020)	Religious Literacy (Hannam et al, 2020)	Links with Freire (1970) (Hannam et al, 2020)
Substantive knowledge	Content	Content	Qualification	Economic purpose	Transmission	Reading the word
Disciplinary knowledge	Engagement	Purpose	Socialisation	Empowerment 'Bildung'	Functional religious literacy	Reading the world
Personal knowledge	Position	Relationship	Subjectification	Emancipation 'Erziehung'	Critical religious literacy	Naming the world

Figure 2: Subject knowledge in RE

Biesta explores the functions, domains and purposes of RE, and uses examples of literacy and Freirean terminology to frame his argument (Hannam et al 2020; Biesta 2015). The first row shows the substantive, or content knowledge, which leads to qualifications for economic purposes. This type of knowledge is being disproportionately promoted through transmission approaches, exemplified by the CCF (DfE, 2019) which advocates teaching from an instructional, knowledge rich curriculum (Willingham, 2009; Zimmerman, 2002; Hirsch, 1987).

I would argue that the current discourse of education is neglecting rows 2 and 3. Biesta views the second domain of RE to be socialisation, which he relates to empowering pupils. Education is defined as 'Bildung' (formation through engaging with others). He compares this to having functional literacy, to 'reading the world' (Hannam et al 2020; Freire, 1970). Pett (2024) calls this 'engagement',

and Ofsted (2021) use the term 'disciplinary knowledge'. This requires pupils to be given independence to use theological, philosophical and social science tools to bring the substantive knowledge to life (Pett, 2024). Without this domain, the substantive knowledge lacks power for students. Unstad and Fjørtoft, (2021) found this to be the case when students were using text books and powerpoints in RE. They wanted the opportunity to 'visit the religion' and 'make meaning' (p.439). As Orchard and Bowen (2024) point out, the problem of subject knowledge in RE is underdeveloped. Their research examined the idea of teachers developing their educational knowledge rather than substantive knowledge through a shared space.

Subjectification, (row 3) is equated to critical literacy, seeing oneself as a subject, which leads to emancipation. It is a critical attempt to reveal reality and can lead to conscientisation if enacted through action and reflection (Friere, 1984). Biesta identifies this existential domain using Freirean language 'naming the world' (Hannam et al 2020). 'Word' and 'world' are intertwined for Freire: text needs to be understood in its historical context but also in a personal context, providing possibility for reinterpretation (Roberts, 1998). German pedagogy can explain the importance of connection through dialogue for subjectification, 'Erziehung' (freedom through becoming known) (Biesta, 2016, p.835). Pett (2024) calls this positionality, and Ofsted (2021) use the term 'personal knowledge'. Another term, 'perspective sharing' (Rix and Paige Smith, 2011) builds empathy and reduces stereotypes. To be an educator in RE could be redefined 'as leading out or leading away from oneself, towards the world', (Biesta, 2020, p.18). Freire calls for an analysis of the teacher- pupil relationship, reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are student and teacher simultaneously (2002, p.365; 1973, p.45).

To develop subjectification in the project, I needed to design a dialogic research approach. Participatory action research challenges colonial approaches to teaching and learning in RE and seemed to be the most appropriate methodology (Jarvis, 2021). Research question three arose from this aim:

To what extent might participating in a focus group support the student teachers to develop their critical reflection in praxis?

Conclusion

The literature review revealed that the current discourse of education, which has changed dramatically in the past five years (Ellis, 2024), is promoting memorable content, and neglecting the other two forms of knowledge in RE (figure 2). This neglect is evident in the literature and the superficial learning reported by Ofsted, (2024), and there is potential for it to be challenged by a

liberatory theory with a focus on praxis. I therefore needed to design a methodology based around decolonisation and a dialogic approach to address research question three.

It is clear that there is a call from the RE community for change in teacher education, specifically how student teachers are supported to be dialogic (Orchard and Bowen, 2024; Unstad, and Fjørtoft, 2021; Castelli 2018; Wegerif, 2010). This is required to promote epistemic justice (Beauchamp, 2023; Stones and Fraser-Pearce, 2022) and religious literacy (Soules and Jafralie, 2021; Biesta, 2010). There is a need to change teacher education in RE in the light of decolonisation (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021; Esau 2021; Bamber et al 2019; Farrell and Lander 2019; Keddie et al 2019). This is challenging due to the time restraints in in initial teacher education (Whitworth, 2020; Revell, 2005) and an absence of conversations around beliefs in Western society (Daddow et al, 2021; Keddie et al, 2019).

Chapter 3: Research Design

Paradigm position

The way I understand the nature of reality informed my research design. As a critical realist, I believe there is an ultimate truth which can be sought but may be unattainable. Therefore, we can do our best to try to know. We can do this through reflecting on our own beliefs, being open to listening to a range of others' beliefs and being ready to change.

My conceptual framework was shaped by the literature review, which revealed to me that there is a problem in the way student teachers are trained to teach RE. Currently, the expectations of learning in RE is based on a positivistic representation of knowledge, the teacher is the expert and learning can be measured by how well it has been memorised (Ofsted, 2021; DfE 2019). This ontology of education is problematic to me. It promotes an individual view of learning where substantive knowledge is seen as the only form of knowledge. Additionally, knowledge is not recognised as contentious and subjective. Disciplinary knowledge which empowers, and personal knowledge which leads to emancipation (figure 2), are both missing.

I therefore needed a methodology which reflected my ontological position. I wanted to create a project for student teachers to share their stories and experiences. The literature reveals that current discourse is oppressing student teachers, as they are being taught to teach that knowledge is equal to memorising content. An educational setting is a microcosm of society, in which many of the same social injustices exist, and introducing critical theorising to bring about change and liberate the oppressed was an aim of the research (McKernan, 2013).

The design was set within an interpretivist paradigm, with a focus on critical theory-praxis approach (Pine, 2008). The inclusion of praxis within my paradigm position and research question relates to the theoretical framework of Freire. 'Praxis' is the combination of reflection and action on the world with an intention to transform it (Freire, 1970). However, Freire did not refer to himself as a critical pedagogue (Barros, 2020). Neither did he align himself with the view of a teacher as a social activist, ready to enact change on pupils. Activism alone 'makes dialogue impossible' (Freire, 1970). Instead, he saw teachers as 'vulnerable actors' (Barros, 2020 p.158), where authentic dialogue with participants leads to a critical attempt to reveal reality. Authentic dialogue leads to a discovery of oneself as part of the world. This means that praxis must involve an emphasis on social justice, leading to an absence of domination, and an empathetic understanding of an others' point of view (Mezirow, 2009). This then results in conscious action for liberation (Freire, 1984). This aligned with my position, as I sought to understand and change the dominant discourse in training RE teachers.

Methodology

To gain data from research required a decolonising approach. The methodology that fitted within my ontological position was participatory action research, as the broad general theory that my research originated in is that dialogic pedagogy is liberatory and monologic pedagogy is oppressive. I therefore needed a research design that promoted dialogue. Within the literature review I explored the current dominant discourse in RE, whereby the teacher holds the knowledge and transmits information to pupils who are 'empty vessels waiting to be filled' (Freire, 1970, p.45). What is constructed (by the curriculum) as reality does not alter ultimate truth, but does require critical reflection, otherwise there is a danger of 'doxa' (Crossely, 2005b), where reality is unquestioned. This is the opposite of epistome (knowledge). A participatory action research approach radically challenges the position of expert teacher, and was therefore appropriate for this project (Lennette, 2022).

A participatory action research approach gave me the opportunity to critically reflect alongside student teachers, to learn how they made sense of situations (Dahlgren, 2022). Working with student teachers regularly, I reflected in my journal how they are often affected by the schools they are placed in. Their identity is open to contestation and change, and with potential for transformation (Bamber et al, 2019; Ivanič, 2004). The methodology encourages student teachers to be inquirers about their own future classrooms (Pine, 2009). It challenges the assumption that academic expertise is the only valid way of knowing (Lenette, 2022). Participatory action research has links with emancipatory education, as it is a social process, which intentionally aims to challenge and change normative discourses (Villacañas de Castro, 2017). It creates space for conversation and dialogue around lived experience, creating new knowledge and therefore decolonising the curriculum (Jarvis, 2021). The democratic and collaborative nature of participatory action research fitted well with themes from the literature review of decolonisation and liberation.

Design

Research question one required an informal group discussion to explore whether the participants' interpretations of figure 1 aligned with my interpretation. I intentionally chose a focus group method, so that we could engage in dialogue.

Research question two allowed me to become more specific in my aims (Drew et al, 2008), as I wanted the participants to move forwards (Freire, 1984) and create new knowledge.

Research question three pointed to the decolonising methodology of participatory action research. This methodology would provide data to show whether a critical group reflection would begin to

shape praxis by having participants work on themselves (Cohen et al, 2017). Additionally, it would give me data to explore the 'subjectification' that Biesta and Hannam (2020) argue is essential as an RE teacher. A semi-structured group interview (SSGI) followed the group discussion to allow participants time to answer specific questions and continue to listen and be shaped by each other's responses.

I used the eight step-process of action research to support my design (Cohen et al 2018). My initial problem was identified using the framework of liberation theory. I identified monologic approaches as dominant in the RE lessons I observed, the literature around teacher training and the RE specific literature reviewed. I found that the monologic approach led to a lack of disciplinary and personal knowledge in RE (see figure 2 in chapter 2). This was exemplified for me in the image produced by the REC, (Pett, 2024) (figure 1). The aim of the focus group was to create a new image together. For this intervention to work, I was aware that I first needed to build good relationships with the student teachers so that they would be willing to be participants. I kept a reflective journal so that I could focus on how I was changing my practice to be more relational. The focus group was implemented and resulted in an image. To gain greater depth, my interpretations of the data was shared in the week after the focus group took place.

Due to the cyclical nature of action research (see figure 3), I plan to continue the project next year with the participants as they progress in their career. Due to the nature of the SSI, I have only completed one cycle of action research. I am aware that conscientisation is an ongoing process in adult learners, and I hope to maintain a relationship with the participants to continue to reflect on the research questions. I would like to conduct an additional semi-structured group interview with the participants when they are early career teachers.
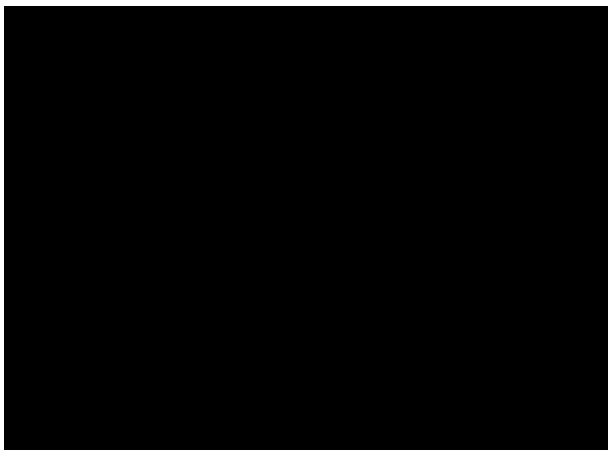

Figure 3 'Action Research Recursive Cycle' (Pine, 2008, p.73).
 IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Characteristics of research participants

After an RE teaching session in February, all the student teachers (around 80) who attended were invited to sign a sheet if they were interested in being part of a participatory action research group in April, to further explore the image I shared with them (figure 1). Sixteen student teachers signed up. When I emailed them in March, eight replied to say they would attend, although three cancelled due to workload. This was anticipated, as the students were in the final phase of their one-year postgraduate teaching degree and were in full-time placement schools whilst also having assignments to complete. The five who attended were a mixed group of 3 males and 2 females. To retain anonymity, the participants were labelled with their initials (BERA, 2024). One shared a faith identity (converted Muslim).

Evaluation of research methods

I used Guba's (1981) four constructs to showcase the trustworthiness of my research methods. At the start of the project, I kept a reflective journal to make notes of the impact of changes I made in sessions. Through journalling, I became more focused on using a dialogic approach as a conceptual framework. In previous years, I had understood this to mean bringing in a visitor, which often resulted in a monologic approach where the student teachers simply listened to someone talk to them about religious and non-religious worldviews. This year, I used more open questions in smaller groups, allowing time for perspective sharing (Rix and Paige Smith, 2011). I used music during reflective tasks, and imaginative scenarios for stimulating discussions (Tisdell and Tolliver, 2009). This was not always effective, as some student teachers wanted to be given facts (Whitworth, 2020). After a teaching session in February 2024, I shared the image (figure 1) with the students and invited them to sign up if they were interested in joining a participatory action research group to explore the image together. The students who chose to be participants all actively participated in the taught sessions. I set up a focus group in April 2024.

The focus group consisted of two parts, a discussion and a semi-structured group interview (SSGI). Prompts were planned (Appendix I). The first hour of the focus group was a group discussion with a non-participatory colleague taking field notes. This meant that I was free to moderate and be part of the discussion (Burton and Bartlett, 2005). Although I did not cherry pick the group, they were all in my tutor group. This may not be a coincidence, as our well-established relationship may have been the reason that they were more likely to join than others (Miller, 2020). As a result of giving up control (Costely et al, 2010) I shared with them that I am studying for a Masters. I felt that this enhanced the

relationship between us as equal participants, on a horizontal rather than vertical pole (Freire, 1970). I shared a summary of Freire's Foundations for Dialogue, 1970 (Ropp, 2022) (Appendix II). This was intended to reach a shared understanding of liberatory pedagogy (Breuing, 2011). We discussed ideas for reimagining the image (figure 1). This part of the focus group was not recorded which resulted in a relaxed atmosphere (Cohen et al, 2018).

Through thematic analysis of the field notes from the discussion and a Microsoft word transcription of the SSGI, a rich story of the focus group was constructed. The field notes from the discussion were typed up the day after the focus group. This added credibility as it ensured that my memory of what had been said was as accurate as possible. Triangulation of the focus group was achieved through the observations in the field notes. I added my own interpretations as comments. During the SSGI, the participants reflected on the process of reimagining the image from part one of the focus group. The input from the participants from the focus group prompted me to return to the literature to read more about specific themes. This aided my understanding of the problem and encouraged me to continually read and reflect on the data as I thematically analysed (Appendix III). I made links to themes from the literature (Appendix IIII). This reflective process added credibility.

Although this study could not be repeated to gain the same results, understanding the methods used will add to the transferability of the project. I audio-transcribed the SSGI through Microsoft Word on my phone and this was edited alongside the video, as the audio from the video recording did not work. This action would not be required for other researchers as audio would usually be available from a video recording. Names, body language and pauses were added to the transcript as comments. The data was analysed thematically by reading and rereading, coding relevant words and phrases and then grouping into themes. Key vocabulary from the field notes and SSGI was transferred onto an excel sheet under the initials of each participant. Codes were then themed according to which research question they answered. I recognised that I was selecting data that I felt was relevant (Cohen et al, 2018). Added to this, I was aware that I may be only choosing data that reflected the Freirean theoretical framework that I was interested in. I wanted to avoid a naïve approach, thinking that I could passively 'give voice' to participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80), so I carefully considered my interpretations. I selected and reported themes that I felt were relevant to the research questions. I chose which data to include and reflected on this (Cohen et al, 2018). This was helped by the process of the participants creating a new image which they discussed in detail and in response to each other.

To ensure confirmability, I shared the analysis of the discussion, SSGI and my own interpretations with the participants (Appendix V). I also ensured that they were able to further communicate with

me if they wanted to add or detract any comments after reflecting on my interpretations and the particular comments I felt were relevant to the research. They all concurred with the interpretations, and none of the participants wanted to change anything they had said. A line of communication remained open throughout (and after) the data analysis. Personal emails were provided by the participants, who all agreed to stay in touch next year to continue the project. However, my position of power was difficult to change, as we met on campus. For the next cycle of action research, I plan to meet the participants on a nearby beach (a suggestion from a participant).

Data is stored either on the cloud (field notes write up, MP4 file of video, excel spreadsheet, transcript of SSGI), or as paper copies (original field notes), and will be available for 6 months (BERA 2024). Participants were made fully aware of the research in terms of aims and methods and assured that the research was optional and would not affect the outcomes of their course (see Appendix VI).

Although this is a small-scale study with just five participants, the project has transferability as the participatory action research methodology encourages a dialogic approach, which successfully resulted in new knowledge being created which will be of interest to the wider RE community. Thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) were attained through the social nature of the methodology. By analysing, grouping and cross-checking data with the participants, I am confident that I have engaged in a robust and trustworthy research design (Grix, 2002).

Ethics in research design

Before I began this project, I engaged in ethics in practice (Macfarlane 2009) by anticipating issues, engaging in reflexivity using my reflective journal, and planning and discussing the project with colleagues (see Appendix VII and VIII). I ensured participants were aware of the aims of the project and guaranteed anonymity (Appendix VI; BERA, 2024). I undertook the Ethical Badged Course (The Open University, 2022). To further support the moral basis of my research, I engaged in a decision-making process, using an ethical grid (Stuchbury and Fox, 2009).

<u>External Layer</u>

I considered the ethical context of the setting in which I work. I modelled a dialogic approach as I wanted to challenge the traditional student-lecturer role within the focus group. This position required me to be aware of my status as an insider- outsider researcher and how this affected the responses of the students (Costely et al, 2010; Mercer, 2007). I have an established professional relationship with the student teachers. To make this project authentically collaborative, I invited the student

teachers to be co-constructors, which required me to give up some of my 'power' and invite some risk into the project (Costely et al, 2010).

As the participants shared their experiences with the group, I needed to continually be aware of my professional responsibilities, upholding my duty of care, the reputation of the university and placement schools that may be referred to in the data, ensuring that all involved are not recognisable. I maintained respect and truth for participants (BERA 2024). I wanted participants to feel comfortable, so I chose to set the focus group in a teaching room as it was a quiet, familiar space. We sat in a circle around a desk, so that we could all see one another to further establish trust (Burton and Bartlett, 2005).

I needed cultural sensitivity (Stuchbury and Fox, 2009) as I was aware of potential participant reluctance to voice opinions which were critical of the course or placement schools. This could have been a negative consequence of the research. However, I considered this, and weighed it up with the positive consequence of the participants having a small, shared space to critically reflect on their current and future practice. I felt that the benefits of the research outweighed the negative issues (Stuchbury and Fox, 2009). Another risk of the project was controversial or ideological personal views of the participants. I prepared myself to act professionally within the Prevent guidelines (DfE, 2019) if any safeguarding issues arose. Further, the REC may be offended if the group interprets figure 1 as colonial. This needed to be considered for the greater good, and I felt that the potential offence was outweighed by the validity of the findings. Integrity in the research was essential so that I did not waste others' time or resources.

Consequential layer

An important ethical consideration was the academic and professional pressures from the teaching course. I wanted to ensure that the student teachers benefited, and the project would cause no harm (BERA, 2024), so I planned one focus group rather than two separate evenings which was my initial choice. The focus group was scheduled at 2.45-5pm, following back-to-back lectures. I thought about their needs and successfully applied for funding for pizza (Appendix VIIII). I felt that this was 'commensurate with good sense' (BERA, 2024) as I wanted to make sure that they were not rushing to leave. Ideally, I wanted to meet with the group again but due to teaching and assignment pressures, none of the participants were able to do this. This was anticipated, and I did not rely on it for my project.

Deontological layer

During the teaching sessions in February, I shared my interpretation of the image (figure 1). We discussed the implications of teaching from an 'expert' position. This meant that the student teachers knew my positionality before they were invited to be participants in the focus group. The duty of truthfulness established trust and encouraged collaboration (Stuchbury and Fox, 2009).

I used the BERA (2024) guidelines to ensure that the findings would remain anonymous to protect the participants, university and schools. I shared a letter with the participants before the focus group (See Appendix VI).

<u>Relational layer</u>

This is an integral layer as the intention to do no harm and to avoid imposition were essential in my relationship with the student teachers. I planned a methodology so that trust would be established early through the taught sessions, which I reflected on in my journal. I considered the pressures the participants faced to avoid making insensitive demands on their time. I involved them in validation by emailing my interpretations of the discussions, my comments around their answers to the semi-structured interview, and the final version of the image (Appendix V). All participants shared their personal email addresses and agreed to be contacted next year. The relationship with the participants helped me to address research question three.

Critical evaluation

There were some issues in the methodology. I experienced challenges as a new researcher, specifically in the technology. The video had no audio, and the transcription was sometimes difficult to follow, especially due to a range of regional accents amongst the participants. I also repeated my question about their 'initial response to the image' (Appendix I). However, this seemed to be useful, as it meant that the participants responded in greater depth, which led to some rich insights about the problems of the monologic approach to teaching RE, and the benefits of dialogue.

The participatory action research approach resulted in an ethically constructed project. By sharing the data and analysis with the participants, the project was less autocratic and more democratic (Costely et al, 2010), modelling the process of dialogue and decolonialisation that I was hoping to promote in the research. Due to the small-scale nature of the project, I cannot claim generalisability. However, I have a valid set of findings, which has resulted in an image which can be used by other teacher training institutions. I would therefore argue that my methodology has been effective for this research.

Chapter 4 Data Presentation and Analysis

Findings and analysis

Data from the discussion field notes are as close to verbatim as can be remembered. Data from the semi-structured group interview is labelled as SSGI. Participants are labelled with their initials.

Research question 1: How do student teachers engage with the current image for teaching RE?

Figure 1: The image of an explorer, representing how to teach RE (Pett, 2024).

Colonialism, silencing and epistemic injustice.

Initial responses to the image in the discussion included:

"White man", "Eurocentric" (NS).

"English passport", "Like the diary", "Pilgrimage is better", "Colonial" (WR).

"Not for working classes" (JS).

The SSGI provided more detailed analysis of the image:

"Individual holds that power", "Monologic approach" (CM).

"Individual put on a pedestal" (CMc).

"They've gone on a solo or very limited venture, maybe railroad other cultures a bit", "So it's this lone man coming in putting their perspectives on everything", "People just relying on these explorers" (NS).

An emancipatory education, according to Freire, requires a decolonising approach which thinks critically (Freire, 1984, p.543) rather than imposing 'knowledge from above' (Mayo, 2022 p.2280). The explorer in the image is literally, "Up there and he's looking down and that's just like fundamentally wrong" (CMc).

Although the theme of colonialism was evident from the data, it emerged that not all the participants experienced this approach when they were on their teaching placement. CM shared her experience as a pupil of RE in Northern Ireland which she felt was monologic, taught from a Christian confessional approach. However, her placement experience in a school which values oracy changed her perception of RE:

"The teacher invites pupils to talk about their beliefs and educate others… asks them to share, it's powerful, it empowers the pupil, they learn from each other."

Contrastingly, NS did experience a monologic approach on her placement. However, she felt that her lessons, which she felt were "boss," were effective because she was teaching Christianity which is, "familiar to me". Teaching other religions, especially in the context of the Israel-Hamas war, leads to "fear."

The participants shared that some schools were not allowing them to discuss the Israel-Hamas war. This reminded me of the silencing theme from the literature review (Keddie et al, 2019; hooks, 1994; Freire, 1984), and the implications for epistemic injustice (Stones and Fraser Pearce, 2022). It relates to the notion of impartiality explored in Chapter 2, and the problems of claiming this without having space for self-examination, so that the worldview that is held by the teacher may still be evident in the way they teach.

NS found a problem with the way that pupils were given, "Facts to memorise… why would teachers do this?" She interpreted figure 1 to have "deep, hidden messages". This was expanded upon when she detailed how western explorers "railroaded" other cultures, and people relied on them for knowledge, and believed the accounts describing "uneducated or savage" natives. She suggested that a new image should "deviate from that stereotypical explorer" (SSGI). Her detailed response to the image provided a useful analogy of how damaging RE can be when it depends on one "lone" interpretation (see Appendix III).

The response to research question one can be summed up by JS, who describes his initial response as:

"One person, one perspective, looking one direction."

This quote embodies the individualistic neoliberal approach which I have argued in the literature review permeates the current educational discourse.

Research Question 2: How might a critical reflection support participants to respond to the image (figure 1)?

<u>Subjectification and the New Image</u>

The data from the field notes, specifically CM's experience at her placement school which values oracy, revealed that if RE is taught from a dialogic approach, it can move away from the monologic approach of figure 1. However, as explored in the literature review, to truly move away from an expert position, a process of critical reflection is required, which leads to a constant state of becoming (Freire, 1984). Research question two aimed to answer whether a critical reflection could support the participants to respond to their initial thoughts about the image by creating a new image together. The SSGI generated a lot more reflective data than the group discussion. I think that this was because the group used the new image which had been created during the discussion which gave them:

'Through praxis, a new knowledge of reality' (Freire, 1984, p. 543).

To move away from the monologic approach and the teacher as expert, the role of the teacher as explorer (figure 1) needed to be reimagined. The teacher needed to become the subject, to recognise that they have a worldview and they are not 'neutral' (Biesta 2020; Freire, 1984). NS recognised that, "I feel that I'm inclusive but I think it's wrong to say that I have no bias. I'm an atheist so I think I must have bias towards religion. I don't want to be ignorant". She began to realise that there is a lot "that she does not know". CMc confirmed this, "Teachers can be ignorant too." "The thing is like the more you know the more you realise that you don't know."

Beginning this process of subjectification (Biesta, 2020), the participants started to re-imagine their image of themselves as teachers in the RE classroom. As JS stated, the new image (figure 4), "Made me consider my role as an educator from a different perspective."

The new image, created during the discussion, featured four non-human figures with the world in the centre. The participants wanted the figures to have no identifiable protected characteristics. I sketched the image on poster paper as the participants discussed it. I then shared it with a graphic designer, who created the new image.

Above each figure is a life world in a speech bubble. Behind is their individual path, leading to a shared sea. There is a sun and a thundercloud. From reflecting on this image and reading more, I felt that the process of creating it echoed Freire:

'Men and women create their own existence, in a creative act, that is always social and historical even while having its specific, personal dimensions' (1984, p. 534).

Figure 4 New image

<u>Dialogue</u>

The inclusion of life worlds in the image supports the dialogic vision of the teacher- pupil relationship, where both exist simultaneously on an equal level, another theme which synthesises with the literature review (Freire, 2002; 1973) (See Appendix IIII).

It is not clear who the teacher is in figure 4, or in which direction they are looking. A dialogic approach moves the power from the 'expert' teacher (DfE, 2019) to the "collective" (CM). This means that the anxiety, which was apparent in the participants responses, is reduced:

"There are going to be things that you don't know. Kids are anxious about getting something wrong. There's always the pressure on getting something wrong. You learn a lot more by getting that thing wrong." (JS).

These comments align with the 'necrophilic' or 'death-loving' approach (Freire, 1984, p. 526), explored in the literature review, where there is a correct answer held by the teacher. This is contrasted with a biophilic approach, which is life affirming. I interpreted this as giving pupils freedom

to think (Dewey, 1916). JS continued this line of thought when he considered the importance of the figures looking in different directions:

"So this image will help… kind of visualise being a collective. You might not always get exposed to everything in that image all at the same time. It depends which way you're looking, but you have the opportunity to look at everything, see where other people are looking and maybe why they are looking that way" (JS).

This shows that pupils have the power to choose which way to look, rather than the individual power of, "One person, one perspective, looking in one direction" (JS).

This approach impacted on the way JS saw himself,

"Instead of an assessment point, going... 'Oh dear', going, 'Oh brilliant they don't know that they're going to leave knowing that".

These reflective comments from JS add weight to the theory that a dialogic methodology can liberate participants. Without the focus group, this rich dialogue would not have been possible. I felt that the input from the participants led me to a new understanding of the importance of dialogue, not just in the primary setting but also in initial teacher education, giving learners the power to choose 'which direction' to look.

CM used the image to expand on the theme of dialogue:

"Dialogic teaching... it's not like individualism versus collectivism, but almost, how you move forward… you listen to each other. Your way of teaching is I'm just going to share with you facts (figure 1). Everyone sort of been on a journey and bring their collective viewpoints together (figure 4)."

CM's input corresponds with liberatory pedagogy. She talked about how to 'move forward', and Freire proclaimed that the liberated 'Must move forward constantly' (1984, p.544). He contrasted the 'I teach you' with the 'we save ourselves' (1984, p.542), which she mirrored in her contrast of figure 1 and figure 4. The 'journey' she referred to was also mentioned in the discussion by WR, who suggested that a pilgrimage was more culturally appropriate and inclusive. Freire also used this picture, as he describes those who embark on a pilgrimage as holding history in their hands, creating it and recreating themselves in it (1984, p. 532). This image of 'holding' history could be seen as the world which is in the centre of figure 4. As CM noted later in the SSGI:

"'You start with like the world and then the people around it, we built from that - we have the life world then you feed that back in like through dialogue. Two-way conversation that you have is part of lessons. What you have to share and then being able to take that back and then feed that back in".

This process, according to Freire, requires activism, which can be seen in the active nature of "take that back and feed that back in" from the above quote. The aim is to struggle against oppression, which means that it needs to be done, not just talked about. This is where cycle two of the participatory action research project plays a part (figure 3), as due to the nature of the way RE is taught in primary schools only JS taught RE after the focus group and was able to share how the image reshaped his approach to teaching.

Humility

JS commented on the sun and thundercloud in figure 4 which the participants had chosen to represent the 'weather' of the classroom. JS called the thundercloud, "Embracing of the discomfort" of an RE classroom where there is not always a "right" answer. NS responded to JS and picked out this phrase:

"I like this 'Embracing of the discomfort' as I try very hard to make the classroom a very comfortable place. I would have missed out on important conversations. I love the fact that the uncomfortable weather has been included, because its it shapes us into an experience. There are going to be things that you don't know."

This shift from being an 'expert' to "embracing of the discomfort" reminded me of Freire's call for 'humility' (See Appendix II). This theme is continued by CMc and CM. Although not religious himself, CMc noted, "The religious way of life shapes reality." Input from CM aligned with this, as she noted that pupils needed opportunities to, "connect external life to school". CMc continued: "'One of the great ironies in teaching is like the teacher underestimates how much they can learn from the kids."

The critical reflection during the SSGI revealed an active response from the participants, which became more analytical as they listened to one another and reflected on their experiences and aspirations as future teachers.

Research Question 3: To what extent might participating in a focus group support the student teachers to develop their critical reflection in praxis?

Fatalism and Conscientisation

The creation of the new image (figure 4) was a collective process. The image represents the primary RE classroom, but also reflects the action research process through which the participants created the image. Its movement from an individual "holding the power" (CM) to a recognition that "how you move forward… you listen to each other… as a collective" (CM), echoes liberatory pedagogy. Freire posits that the dominated classes, who I have interpreted to mean the participants (including myself) as dominated by the CCF (DfE, 2019), must take part in this denunciation and annunciation. They must not be left out of the picture, and the process will fill them full of hope (1984, p. 543).

The opposite of hope is fatalism (Freire, 1984). The SSGI gave participants the opportunity to share in a safe space how they felt. A colonial approach to teaching necessarily positions the teacher as an expert. This was an image that was rejected by the participants. However, there was an undercurrent of anxiety from WR, who seemed to passively accept this role of teacher as expert,

"So much content to get through. Not sure how you can build in system for dialogic approach. System does not allow for it."

This comment synthesises with the taken for granted assumptions explored in the literature review that education consists of learning and memorisation (DfE, 2019).

However, this was rejected by CMc:

"But that is you just being fatalistic, oh no there's no time… Of course there is time."

This reference to fatalism by CMc reminded me of one of the ways in which the status quo is upheld in society by an ingrained fatalistic belief, that nothing can be done to change (Ozga, 2012). This can be seen as one of the 'tools of whiteness' which allows dominance over an oppressed group to continue (Picower 2009; Ladson-Billings 2006).

WR seemed to progress from his initial fatalistic approach, recognising the required activism for decolonisation. This is evident when he reflected on his initial response to figure 1:

"You think 'that would be good and useful thing' and then you kind of get on with it and make the lesson but actually think yeah, he's white... it might be obvious but just be inclusive of everyone."

The participatory action research group gave space for the image to be critically engaged with, rather than expecting student teachers to just get "on with it". As explored in the literature review,

subjectification requires seeing oneself as a subject (Biesta, 2020). This relates to critical realism, being authentically aware of the world 'as it really is' (Freire, 1984 p. 543), and then acting on it.

Another input from WR was the word he chose to describe an effective RE teacher during the discussion. His word was:

"Neutral, and if not neutral, impartial."

Interestingly, Freire used these terms as the antithesis of conscientisation, claiming that if humans viewed themselves as neutral, they unconsciously position themselves on the side of the powerful. This way of thinking preserves the status quo. Freire critiqued that the naïve need to 'die as elitists', renouncing the 'myth of impartiality' as generating the inferiority of other people (Freire, 1984, p. 526). Reflecting on these comments from WR and the Freirean 'myths', I returned to my journal, where I had made notes from my teaching sessions this year. I had noted student teachers referring to themselves as neutral, equating it with the view that they are 'just normal.' Neutrality and impartiality was explored in the literature review, and although calls are made for teaching from an impartial stance (Jackson and Everington, 2017), this can be problematic for students who have a strong personal identity (Farrell and Lander, 2019). More time is required in ITE for student teachers to develop a classroom persona which is not being undermined by expectations of the profession. The findings from this project highlighted to me the need to engage in this kind of deep reflection with student teachers at this point in their training.

The discussion continued when JS challenged the concept of being a tolerant RE teacher.

"We can only be tolerant, we can't be perfect" (WR).

"Are you a human with layers or a teacher who models how to behave?" (JS).

This exchange happened during the discussion, but I think that it set a foundation for the image that was subsequently created. Perhaps in the intersubjectivity, promoted by the new image (figure 4), the participants were able to think more clearly about the need to be aware of their humanity, the 'layers' that construct their worldview. This corresponds to Jackson and Everington (2017), who found that the student teachers they studied all used their personal experiences when teaching and valued a relationship of trust with the pupils. This contrasts with the "teacher who models how to behave", which has robotic connotations. I think JS was very against the idea of tolerance, as it does not express a feeling of relationship. Tolerance is a contentious term related to fundamental British Values, which has been criticised in its incompatibility with the pluralism of RE (Farrell, 2016).

Conclusion

To answer research question 3 more fully, I plan to revisit the participants for the next stage of the action research cycle (figure 3). However, I know that they enjoyed the process. NS has asked me if she can read this dissertation, CM "loved" the image, JS has emailed a lesson plan for a dialogic approach to teaching RE. CMc, JS and NS came to meet me to go for a walk, mirroring a more culturally appropriate 'pilgrimage' rather than 'exploration', suggested by WR. Sadly, WR did not complete the course.

The research questions were successful, resulting in new knowledge and an image which can be used for future research and collaboration (see Appendix X). Throughout the project, I ensured that I critically reflected on my own actions. At one point I was concerned that I had been too open about my own opinions of figure 1. However, the process was continually open, providing space and encouragement for participants to question and disagree. The project resulted in an image that reflects the thinking of the group. It has challenged me to think deeply about the principles on which RE teaching is based.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The project gave me the opportunity to work with student teachers as co- participants, to create an image (figure 4) which challenges both the original image (figure 1) and the monologic discourse of Initial Teacher Education. The new image revealed that the participants valued a dialogic approach which provided a safe space for pupils and teachers to explore their life worlds together as equals, whilst also exploring the truth claims from the world.

Rejection of impartiality

Research question 1: **How do student teachers engage with the current image for teaching RE?**

New knowledge arose from the project. The rejection of impartiality from JS as a characteristic of an effective RE teacher was a surprise to me, as Jackson and Everington's (2017) research which states that RE teachers need to be impartial is widely accepted. I re-read Freire, who also rejected impartiality (1984). Impartiality is defined as recognising the right for pupils to hold their own religious and non-religious beliefs (O'Grady and Jackson 2020). Appropriate skills and attitudes should be developed during ITE to promote this impartiality (Franken and Loobuyck, 2016). However, Freire condemns impartiality as viewing others as inferior. This led me to posit whether the subjectification that Biesta (2020) calls for, which corresponds to the teacher 'becoming' the subject, and reducing their power to be equal with pupils, can be aligned with the aim of an impartial teacher. I have concluded that it cannot, and the aim in ITE should be to provide time for student teachers to critically reflect and act on their positionality, to begin the process of subjectification, leading to conscientisation. Freire's principle of humility (1970) (see Appendix II) is essential here, which is incompatible with an image of a teacher as an impartial expert (figure 1).

New Paradigm

Research question 2 **How might a critical reflection support participants to respond to the current image?**

The critical reflection resulted in a new image (figure 4), which reduced the power of the teacher as there is no distinction between the figures. This does not equate to removing the rights of pupils (or student teachers) to their own beliefs, but it does mean that all the beliefs in the classroom can be considered equally, including the teachers' own. This requires an important new paradigm in teacher education, where the teacher is no longer seen as an expert in RE, but as a subject alongside the pupils, facilitating critical religious education, exploring truth claims using substantive, disciplinary

and personal knowledge. The teachers' own life world or personal identity needs to be recognised and critically reflected on during the crucial time of ITE so that any deeply held unconscious bias can be explored in a safe community of dialogue.

Impact on Praxis

Research question 3: **To what extent might participating in a focus group support the student teachers to develop their critical reflection in praxis?**

As Freire states, no-one conscientises anyone else (1984, p. 528), and it is only in each of our actions that conscientisation can happen. I would like to continue the cycle of action research (figure 3) working with the participants to find out how the image has impacted their praxis. To be truly authentic, the image should not remain static (Freire, 1984). The project has resulted in stronger relationships with the student teachers than previous years. CMc regularly pops in to see me, and JS has been in touch about developing his planning. I would like to continue developing this relational pedagogy (Miller, 2020) next year with them and with new student teachers.

The reflective nature of the participatory action research project has impacted my own praxis. I want to model the implications of subjectification, becoming a subject rather than acting as an expert, exploring religions and worldviews according to the new image (figure 4). As part of my role as teacher educator, I also provide training to existing teachers in RE. The findings will provide useful material to explore with current teachers both for professional development and for supporting student teachers (See Appendix X).

Future implications

I plan to share the image with the wider national Religious Education community. This may be difficult as the findings show that figure 1 is colonial. However, I want to represent the student voice and act as a constructive critic, revealing a problem with the new Draft curriculum resource (REC, 2024). I have already presented figure 4 to RE Today, a publisher for RE resources. They welcomed the image and have asked to work with me. I hope that in the future my conclusions can be used as practice recommendations for teacher education in RE and to build the profile of RE nationally through subject advocacy.

Future research in the classroom should explore the hypothesis that a dialogic approach to teaching RE challenges the assertion that RE requires as impartial expert teacher. It could question whether the concept of an impartial RE teacher promotes a monologic approach which runs counter to

liberatory theory. To develop the research further, critical race theory could be applied to explore the problems of a monologic approach in RE.

Postscript Narrative Critical Reflection

Knowledge and understanding

I used the critical reflection grid to structure this reflection (Appendix XII). Feedback from TMA01 prompted me to focus on the goal of my dissertation, which was to involve student teachers as participants to explore the distinction between monologic and dialogic approaches to teaching RE. I realised the importance of focusing on my conceptual framework, which meant that I narrowed my thinking to liberatory theory and moved away from the problems of positionality and communities of practice which had made TMA01 too complex. This led me to focus on the problem of the monologic approach, where knowledge is transmitted, and to critically analyse the literature in teacher training frameworks which helped to develop my conceptual framework. Eventually I found the image of the explorer, which I used in a teaching session. However, from the session it became evident through conversations with the student teachers that this image could be harmful and could represent a colonial monologic approach. As this did not fit with my framework, I was interested to engage further with student teachers, to hear their interpretations of the image and to move forward to create a new image.

Having no prior experience of research meant that I needed to investigate the most suitable methodology for this project. I now feel confident in a participatory action research methods paradigm, and how it can effectively lead to change in practice. I have noticed that I am more critically reflective as a result of engaging with the data and making connections to theory. This was evident when I thought about JS's comments about impartiality, and I made a connection with Freire (1984), who also rejects impartiality, and Jackson and Everington's (2017) research, which calls for impartial RE teachers. I found the process of thinking through the implications and problems of impartiality in RE useful to support the new image, which calls for the teacher to be equal with the pupils.

Links to practice

The process of writing this dissertation taught me the importance of connecting with others when developing a research project. I found that engaging with peers on the combined tutor group forum and in the tutorials led to a better understanding of my project (see Appendix X). I contributed regularly and found it useful to write for a different audience.

I was sponsored by a charity this year and shared my project through an RE network. Speaking to others in the field helped me to clarify my thoughts and relate to others' experiences. I have presented my findings to different audiences. These experiences helped me to feel confident about

the project and the strength of the findings. Completing the dissertation gave me the opportunity to reflect and act to plan and improve my future practice. It has been an exciting project, one which I have been thinking about and developing since EE814, and I hope to continue working on it into the next phase of my study.

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Appendices

Appendix I Prompts for Focus Group, Discussion followed by SSGI

Outline of Discussion:

1. Share with participants the intention to teach more dialogically this year and the use of the reflective journal.

2. Ask: what is your UG degree and why did you want to join the participatory action research group?

3. Share the definitions of monologic and dialogic the student teachers were introduced to in their February RE session.

Discussion prompts:

- What are our thoughts on these terms?

- Have you had any dialogic teaching moments since February on placement to share?

- Any monologic teaching moments?

4. To establish a common understanding of the importance of liberation pedagogy, look at the Freirean Principles of Dialogue (appendix II).

Discussion prompts:

-What do they mean to us?

-How might they help us to think about what it means to be an effective RE teacher?

5. Conch shell – participants share one word they feel an RE teacher needs.

6. Share the image (figure 1).

Discussion prompts:

-What does it tell us about expectations for learners in RE?

-Is this dialogic enough for us?

-Can we approach the image from a more anti-colonial perspective?

-Can we reimagine the image for student teachers?

-What images could we use? Brainstorm.

7. Can we create an image to show a new understanding of a primary RE teacher? – gather ideas, note down ideas and thoughts from the group, provide pens for participants to also make notes on image or new paper.

Break for Pizza.

Outline of Part 2, Semi-Structured Group Interview
<u>RECORD THIS</u>

<u>Prompt questions for semi-structured interview</u>

1. What were your initial thoughts about the image (figure 1)?
2. Has your thinking been changed by the discussions?
3. Has the image we have created changed the way you see yourself as an RE primary teacher?
4. Do you think there are any remaining problems with this image? How could these be overcome?

Appendix II Foundations for Dialogue (1970) (Ropp, 2022).

Paulo Freire's Foundations for Dialogue

FOUNDATIONS FOR DIALOGUE
from Paulo Freire

"If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. **Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.**"

If I do not love the world -- if I do not love life -- if I do not love people -- I cannot enter into dialogue.

"The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. **Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself.**"

LOVE

HUMILITY

Dialogue cannot exist without humility.

"How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? **At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know.**"

Dialogue requires an intense faith in humankind.

". . . faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, **faith in their vocation to be more fully human.** Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation."

FAITH

HOPE

Dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness.

"**Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it.** If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious."

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking.

"For the naive thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized 'today.' For the critic, **the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of man.**"

CRITICAL THINKING

All of the above text is drawn from Chapter 3 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (1970).

Graphic created by Dr. Sarah Ropp, 2021

Appendix III Extract: Thematic Analysis

Research Question 1: How do student teachers engage with the current image for teaching RE?
Key
humility/ vulnerable actor/ recognition of self/ **subjectification**
Barriers
Colonial/ monologic
Life worlds
class structure
dialogue

Data from discussion	**Data from SSGI**
oppressive	if you think of what an explorer is specially western
Eurocentric approach	they've gone on a solo or very limited venture
Image= where are the children	maybe railroad other cultures a little bit
Image = where are the other perspectives	put their own perspective in
	so it's this lone man coming in putting their perspectives on everything
	one person one perspective looking one direction'
Image = Pilgrimage better	be inclusive
Image = Not representative of all cultures	so he's up there and he's looking down
	we can put ourselves on a pedestal
Image= White man.	monologic image...individual holds that power
Image= White colonial image	
Image = not for working classes.	embracing of the discomfort'
Image = Not representative of all classes	I try very hard to make classroom a very comfortable place
	I would have missed out on... important conversations
	I love the fact that the uncomfortable... weather has been incuded
	because its...it shapes us into.. An experience
	there are going to be things that you don't know
	kids are anxious about getting something wrong

Appendix IIII Themes from literature and data

Key:

Themes unique to literature review	Themes unique to focus group data analysis

Shared themes

Promotion of teacher impartiality

Impartiality as a myth

Rejection of teacher impartiality

Need for humility

Epistemic Injustice and silencing

Colonialism

Problem of Expert teacher

Themes from literature review

The value of 'not knowing'

Themes from focus group data analysis

Monologic vs Dialogic

Life worlds

Rejection of neutrality

Rejection of fatalism

Subject knowledge as threefold with an overemphasis on substantive content knowledge delivered by an expert teacher

Need for subjectivity in ITE to develop sense of self as 'subject' leading to conscientisation

Appendix V Extract: Analysis and interpretations, shared with participants (09.05.2024)

NS

Your input and my interpretations	
Discussion (Based on notes from field work	Any thoughts/ comments?
These are notes from the field work so not your direct words: *NS started the discussion by sharing what she knows about Freire:* During UG drama I read a chapter about education and theatre, and came across PF. At first I thought his ideas were bonkers, then realised perhaps his thoughts about school as oppression is true. We need to help pupils to be in control of their learning. The analogy of empty vessels to be filled promotes eurocentrism and is oppressive. We need their life worlds to be bought to the classroom.	
SSGI	
Q.1 what were your initial thoughts of image? *This was a really thoughtful response*: "We know from history that explorers came back with stories of 'savage natives' who were uneducated and immoral. We relied on their accounts because we had not seen anything for ourselves. Now we know more, we understand that this initial impression was wrong, we have needed a much deeper understanding of a culture to realise how much these peoples knew and understood about the world". *This is a good analogy of how RE, when it is superficial learning and depends on one "lone interpretation" can be damaging. I interpret NS to be saying that although the image seems to be simple, it actually has deep unintentional hidden messages.* "if you're choosing an image to put on a poster talking about being aware of your own perspectives when talking about cultures and religions it maybe should deviate from that stereotypical explorer and so I'm pretty happy with what we created." *– I like the faint sarcasm of this comment!* **Q2. how has the image we've created changed the way you see yourself as an RE primary teacher?** *Despite my question being repetitive, NS has thought of something good here, embracing of the discomfort.*	

Appendix VI Participant Information and Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet

The Open University

Dear PGs, thank you for expressing an interest in the upcoming participatory action research project that I am hosting.

Below you will find some details of the project.

Date: 16th April

Times: 2.45-5pm with takeaway pizza

What is the aim of the participatory action research (PAR)?

The aim of the PAR is to gain a student teacher perspective on an aspect of education as part of a small-scale investigation for a Masters qualification designed to contribute to knowledge and practice in my chosen area of specialism. The title of the study is:

A qualitative participatory action research (PAR) project with RE Primary student teachers, aiming to reimagine an image to support future teaching.

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?

This project is part of my studies on the Open University Masters module E822 'Multi-disciplinary dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth: Inclusive Practice'. I will be analysing the data collected and reporting my findings in the dissertation I submit to the University as my final assessment for my Masters qualification.

Why are you being invited to participate in this research?

You have been chosen as your experiences and opinions would be highly valuable in helping to address a question which is considered one which will have value for your future teaching.

If you take part in this research, what will be involved?

The focus group is intended to last no longer than 2 hours and will be in an ███ classroom.

The focus group will consist of 2 parts. Part 1 will be an open discussion, using the framework of Foundations for Dialogue (Freire, 1970). We will discuss the terms monologic and dialogic discourse, and our experiences of both teaching approaches. We will then consider a pictorial framework which has been set forward by the Religious Education Council (a white, male explorer), and critically reflect on its use and how we could adapt it to promote the aim of teaching RE from a liberation pedagogy approach. We will consider how we could reimagine this PF to share our understanding of what an RE primary teacher is. The discussion will be observed by a non-participatory observer, who will take field notes. Part 2 will be a semi structured group interview, which will be video recorded so that we can analyse the data.

I will transcribe and anonymise the group discussion before sharing any part of this with my tutor or as part of the final dissertation. I will share my data analysis with you and other members of the group so that we can pick out key themes together and change any aspect that you would like to be altered.

Your contribution will be recognised by a pseudonym and you will be asked if you would like to suggest what name should be used. Any other real names referred to during the interview will be removed and renamed, unless you would like your input to be recognised.

Will what you say be kept confidential?

Your participation will be treated in **strict confidence** in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information will be passed from me to anyone else. All data will be stored securely on password protected devices and the original notes and recording will be destroyed after 6 months. Your consent forms will be stored safely in our professional setting as agreed with the senior leader overseeing the safe conduct of this research. In the case of my notes of the interview, these will be kept confidential and typed up as soon as possible. The video will be kept securely for 6 months and then destroyed. However, if you disclose anything during your interview which I consider means that you might be unsafe or have been involved in a criminal act, because this is a safeguarding concern, I will need to pass this immediately to the organisational Designated Safeguarding Officer.

I will be submitting an analysis of the data collected from the interviews as part of my dissertation submitted as the end-of-module assessment. I also plan to present my findings to relevant audiences. I can confirm that neither you as an individual nor the setting will be identifiable in any of these reports and presentations.

What happens now?

After reading this information sheet, please review and complete the consent form. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw your consent at any point up by letting me know, until the time I am using your data in my university assessments (May 2024). As soon as you let me know you wish to withdraw, your consent forms and any data collected will be destroyed.

What if you have other questions?

If you have any other questions about the study I would be very happy to answer them. Please contact me at ███████████████████

E822 INTERVIEWS CONSENT AND ASSENT FORM

(to be completed by all participants)

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form by 10th April to ███████████████

Have you read the information about this interview?	YES	NO
Have you asked all the questions you want?	YES NO	
Do you understand that you may withdraw (up to June 2024)?	YES	NO
Are you happy for the interview to be video recorded?	YES	NO
Are you happy with how your data will be stored?	YES NO	
Do you understand that your and any other real names as well as any identifiable information will be removed from what will be shared after the interview?	YES	NO

Are you happy to take part?   YES   NO

If any answers are 'no' you can ask more questions. But if you **don't** want to take part,

please let me know and **don't** sign your name.

If you **do** want to take part, please write your name and today's date

Your name   _____

Date   _____

Thank you for your help.

Appendix VII Ethical Appraisal Form

Section 1: Project details		
a.	Student name	Elizabeth Yeomans
b.	PI	
c.	Project title	RE-imagining an image: A participatory study exploring monologic and dialogic approaches in Primary RE.
d.	Supervisor/tutor	
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education	/
		Masters in Childhood and Youth	
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	E822
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	16TH April 2024
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	16th April 2024
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in *If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk for advice on travel.*	UK

Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?	/	

#		Yes	No
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research?[1]	/	
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.[2]	/	
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)? If so, have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? [3]		/
5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? [4]		/
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so, have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?	/	
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	/	

---

[1] You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

[2] This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

[3] Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

[4] Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?	/	
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?	/	
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?		/
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		/
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?		/

Appendix VIII Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form
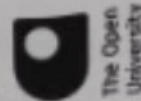
E822 Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth

E822 Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form

Return this completed form by the TMA01 cut-off date in November, by emailing a scanned version which makes clear the handwritten signatures to email address: WELS-ECYS-Masters@open.ac.uk, marked in the subject line 'For the attention of the E822 module team'. If you need to change your decision from an SSI to an EP at a later date this should be only after discussion with your tutor. A new version of this form should be completed and returned as above.

| Student details | Name: Lizzie Yeomans | PI number: ▓▓▓▓▓ |

Student declaration

I accept that the Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences of my actions in carrying out research as part of this dissertation module, which in particular relates to my decision to carry out the small-scale investigation format of this dissertation module.

Should I wish to carry out the small-scale investigation:

In order to explain the expectations of this module, I have shared the Letter to Setting Gatekeepers and Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers with the Setting Gatekeeper.

I agree to work with the Setting Gatekeeper and/or Supervisor to ensure that I adopt the processes and protocols supplied by the Open University to fulfil any legislative requirements and guidance relevant to that setting.

I understand that the setting will have expectations of me with respect to safeguarding practices related to interacting with participants who are aged under 18/vulnerable adults and the disclosure of criminal activities.

Should my participants be aged under 18/vulnerable adults, I have shared with the Setting Gatekeeper a copy of my Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced disclosure (DBS) certificate* *** *** * (or equivalent for those outside the UK). If I do not have the stated certification, I have completed Annex 1 of this document and my Gatekeeper is happy that there will be safe arrangements for me to carry out data collection with participants aged under 18/vulnerable adults.

I commit to using both University and setting advice to support me in taking responsibility for completing my small-scale investigation safely for all involved, ensuring that that the privacy, autonomy and dignity of individuals is preserved.

Please tick one of the boxes below:

| 1. | I will be undertaking my data collection in a practice setting as part of a small-scale investigation (SSI) for my dissertation. | ✓ |
| 2. | I have decided not to complete data collection in a setting and will be conducting the extended literature review and proposal (EP) form of my dissertation. | |

Signed: ▓▓▓▓▓   Date: 16·11·23

*If you have ticked box 1, please complete the following section in conjunction with a leader who will act as the gatekeeper to the setting. This should be someone who can confirm you have permission to conduct data collection in your chosen setting, and who is either willing themselves or able to identify for you someone willing to supervise** your conduct while*

1 of 3

collecting data. (**See the Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers for further information about the role of a Setting Supervisor).

If you are not planning to conduct research directly in a research setting, and do not need to request support from the setting (and this has been agreed with your tutor), sign as the gatekeeper. In these cases you are also signing to say that you will let the leaders of the setting know about your plans for research as a courtesy and offer them a chance to comment before you start your research.

Gatekeeper details	████████████████	
Setting details	████████████████	
Setting address:	████████████████	
Postcode:	████	

Practice-setting gatekeeper declaration – I give permission for Lizzie Yeomans to carry out data collection as part of their masters' multidisciplinary dissertation module E822, and I will act in the role of supervisor** or have delegated this role to someone within the setting to oversee the data collection tasks they will undertake (interview, observation, documentation and/or questionnaire). I have read the Open University E822 Letter to Setting Gatekeepers and Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers. The student and I have discussed the guidance provided and I agree that procedures and protocols will be followed which ensure the research is undertaken ethically in this setting. Please tick one of the statements below:

- [If relevant/delete if not relevant] I am satisfied that Lizzie Yeomans has the necessary disclosures (eg DBS) in place to work with participants under the age of 18/vulnerable adults.
- Lizzie Yeomans does not have the necessary disclosures in place, but I have reviewed Annex 1 of this form and will ensure that they are supervised when collecting data with participants under the age of 18/vulnerable adults.
- Lizzie Yeomans will not be researching with participants under the age of 18/vulnerable adults.

Signed: ████████████████ Date: 16-11-23

Please print name: ████████████████

Please complete this form and return pp. 1–2 to the E822 Module team by the TMA01 cut-off date in November. No data collection should be made unless a signed form has been returned declaring the agreed arrangements for this to take place. We will keep this form for 2 years from the start of your study on E822 and then destroy it. If you need to change your decision from an SSI to an EP at a later date this should be only after discussion with your tutor. A new version of this form should be completed and returned to the email address on p1.

*The Disclosure and Barring Service disclosure certification (or equivalent in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) must bear the same name as that given by you on p.1. Students in Scotland will also need to evidence that they meet the requirements of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme. You must have a clear, enhanced DBS disclosure (or appropriate equivalent) which is current. It must be appropriate for the setting in which you intend to carry out your research and must be recent, i.e. within the last two years.

2 of 3

66

Annex 1: E822 Dissertation Ethical Agreement Self-Declaration

This form is an opportunity to self-declare and provide assurances that you do not pose a level of risk to others, in particular to those under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults, and should be completed if box 1 has been ticked on p.1 of this agreement for those unable to provide a clear DBS or national equivalent certificate. Annex 1 should be shared with the Setting Gatekeeper and should not be submitted in the documents returned to the University.

I confirm that (please tick the right-hand boxes as relevant to each statement):

I have no criminal convictions or conditional cautions considered to be unspent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974***	✓
I have no spent cautions (reprimands or warnings) and convictions for serious violent and sexual offences or other offences of relevance for posts concerned with safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, nor any convictions resulting in a custodial sentence, whether or not suspended.	✓
To my knowledge there is no information held by the authorities that would be considered relevant to working with children and young people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults.	✓
To my knowledge I am not on any barred lists of people not considered suitable for working with children and young people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults.	✓

***The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 aims to give those with convictions or cautions the chance in certain circumstances to start afresh. Under the Act, eligible convictions or cautions become 'spent' after a specified period of time known as the 'rehabilitation period', the length of which varies depending on how the individual was dealt with. You can refer to the relevant extract from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 explaining rehabilitation periods at: http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01841/SN01841.pdf and criteria by which offences will be filtered from official Disclosure and Barring Service Checks, on which this form is based, at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/filtering-rules-for-criminal-record-check-certificates/filtering-rules-for-dbs-certificates-criminal-record-checks

The wording of this form has been guided by that taken from the Disclosure and Barring Service website, in particular from the Sample Policy for the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-sample-policy-on-the-recruitment-of-ex-offenders/sample-policy-on-the-recruitment-of-ex-offenders and Checking Someone's Criminal Record as an Employer https://www.gov.uk/dbs-check-applicant-criminal-record

Signed: ██████████████   Date: 16.11.23

Appendix VIIII Application for funding

Location: **School of Education**	
Organising Body: Open University	
Date(s): From: 17th April	**To: 17th April**
Event Registration Web Link: NA	
If applicable, list which session(s) you wish to attend: N/A	
Please advise as to any special dietary requirements/allergies: N/A	
Identify the benefits you will derive from funding (max 100 words): I will be running a participatory action research focus group, which will take place on the 17th April, 4-6pm. As this is at the end of a day in university, I would like to offer the students some food (takeaway pizza). The aim of the focus group is to reimagine an image to support future student teachers for teaching from a liberatory pedagogy focus. The current image is of an 'explorer' (REC, 2024), which has problematic colonial overtones. I wish to explore this with the students, as well as considering the monologic discourse that is prevalent in primary RE.	

Appendix X Extract from Imported chat from July 1st drop in Accessible here:

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Elizabeth Yeomans: The method I used was a focus group, which consisted of 2 parts, the first hour was a discussion and the second hour a semi-structured group interview. It was the first cycle of participatory action research, and the second cycle will hopefully happen next year when the student teachers are ECTs. Although the interview was in a group, I wanted the participants to listen and respond to one another, engaging in dialogue, so I think the results have validity.

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████████████Lizzie - yes, from what we have discussed, you worked hard to ensure that you had participants' trust, and that they could be comfortable challenging you. (Although in the end they didn't want to!)

Elizabeth Yeomans: To enhance the validity I shared the summaries of the discussion from the focus group with my participants. I have also added my interpretations to the answers they gave during the semi structured group interview and emailed it to them. Unfortunately they didn't challenge any of it! So they are either just agreeing for the sake of it or my interpretations are validated. Would they be considered reliable though, as it is such a small group?

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████████████Lizzie, I think you have worked hard to ensure you have got a rich dataset, that is valid. However as it is a small set of participants, you couldn't lay claim to generalisability - but you may still be able to present findings that could be useful to others in the field?
████████████You probably can't 100% say the findings are generalisable, but they should be indicative of a direction you could move in with some degree of confidence - because you can show your method is robust. (Small set of participants, however a robust method.)
████████████Lizzie - plus, not one of your participants disagreed with your analysis! I'm sure they're not really that shy and retiring.
████████████ @Lizzie - is that something you could use though later in the study to potentially look at the impact this could have on findings / validity etc.

Appendix XI Findings which support future practice

Fatalism	Not just accepting material provided but being critical about the implications.
Colonialism	Realising that the teacher is not always the expert, and a monologic approach leads to silencing and epistemic injustice.
Life-worlds	Recognising that a religious way of life is reality for those who have a religious worldview, and this may be different from the teachers view of reality.
Dialogue	Being open to listen to another to explore and create new knowledge.
Subjectification	Having time to realise that 'the more I know, the more I do not know'.
Embracing the discomfort	Moving away from a culture of silence.
Assessment	Not focusing on one 'direction' or 'right answer', recognising that there are more directions to look which will lead to new understandings of reality.
Intersubjectivity vs neutrality	Rather than seeing ourselves as neutral, recognising that we exist as a social community learning from and with each other.
Conscientisation	Authentic dialogue within a social community can lead to praxis which needs continual action and reflection. This is something which each participant (including me) will need to continue with in their careers, hopefully still in a community of dialogue together.

Appendix VII Reflective Grid

Category	Feedback received, targets achieved and areas of development worked on	How did this shape my dissertation
Knowledge and understanding: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to knowledge of current debate and issues in your specific area of focus; drawing out concepts and themes; choosing a focus area for your dissertation; identifying and overcoming ethical issues.	**TMA 01 Feedbck** 'There is some good and recent policy and academic literature being used, although your conceptual literature dominated the discussion. I don't think this is an issue of too few words here. I think you may need to simplify the theoretical approach in order to more effectively apply it in practice. Have a careful look at the research questions and let me know whether you think there might be two projects in here, rather than one (small scale!) one.' Excellent 'There might even be too much material here! Combining three (or maybe it's four) conceptual frameworks for a small scale investigation may be a bit top heavy. Good to see use of relevant module material from this and previous modules.'	I needed to choose a conceptual framework to focus on and decided to use Freire's Liberatory Theory to explore the dialogic vs monologic/ hegemony in ITE. **Extract from reflective journal**(10.1.24) what is the real heart of what I want to do? Change attitudes to teaching and learning in RE to recognise that the teacher is not always the expert. Redesigned research questions to make sure that it was not too narrow and would allow for student teacher voice to come through. E.g. **Extract from reflective journal (22.5.24)** Removed from research question: 'What light can be cast on the educational landscape the student teachers are entering?' as I realised that this was attempting to answer a question rather than ask a question. **TMA02 Feedback**

		'It's a real pleasure to see your project developing. In response to feedback, you have simplified the conceptual framework and trimmed down the research questions. You now have an excellent small scale project, which promises some interesting findings for yourself and your sponsors. Innovative participatory method - excellent.'
Links to professional practice: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to: designing and/or applying research methods; developing ideas from previous research and frameworks; reflecting and making adaptations during the research and writing process; addressing problems in research design; identifying implications for practice and professional debate; challenging your own assumptions; managing workload and personal motivation.	**TMA01 Feedback** 'Let's have a look over those research questions. I think your ambitious conceptual/theoretical framework might have lured you into squashing two projects into this one proposed dissertation. You do draw on module ideas and frameworks, as well as independently sourced ones, well to think about your professional practice.'	**Extract from reflective journal (27.11.23)** Teaching session – I actively ensured that I made space for dialogic moments. JS was fascinated, 'that's so interesting! I wish we could talk about this all day, I wish there was a job where you could just talk these things through.' He asked questions about how the Church of England was established, referring to Horrible Histories. A Northern Irish student responded from his position. I shared what I knew, then another student added their understanding. **TMA02 Feedback** 'Demonstrated ability to effectively apply module ideas and frameworks to professional practice and

		settings. Thorough understanding of how research and enquiry create and interpret knowledge, and how these apply to student's own research/practice. Shown strong evidence of an ability to make connections between theory and practice.' <u>Extract from reflective journal (25.4.24)</u> Shared the image and the focus group outcomes with RE colleague. Asked his advice about sharing image with REC/ RE today etc. He said 2 reasons: 1. Shows integrity, being true to data set. Obligations to convey 2. Being a constructively critical professional colleague. There are qs to be raised and I have uncovered a problem. Beginning teacher voice illustrates the nature of the problem.