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Promoting tolerance and mutual respect in Religious Education: recommendations for teacher education for developing critical skills for values education

This presentation reports the findings from a PhD thesis which investigates how secondary teachers of Religious Education (RE) construct and promote mutual respect and tolerance. In particular, it highlights the significance of key findings from the thesis for current and future teacher education. The research stemmed from a policy statement from the Department for Education (2014, p. 5) asking all teachers in England to “promote the fundamental British values [FBV] of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”. Rather than examining the nationalistic or securitising aspects of FBV, this research provides an in-depth analysis of mutual respect and tolerance by exploring how in-service teachers promote these two concepts.

The research adopted a nested case study approach of three secondary schools in England. The data generated comprise semi-structured interviews and document analysis of the schemes of work of Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) RE. Data analysis used critical discursive psychology (Wiggins, 2017), a form of discourse analysis, to facilitate a rich and detailed exploration of participants’ constructions.

This presentation highlights findings and recommendations for teacher education arising from the research. The study shows that RE teachers do not rely on any singular approach to promote mutual respect and tolerance but employ a bricolage of pedagogical approaches. In addition, the personal life knowledge of teachers and pupils is constructed as a significant tool for the promotion of mutual respect and tolerance, a finding which builds on existing research from Everington (2012; 2014) in teacher education. However, the practitioners in this research suggested that they had predominantly learnt to promote mutual respect and tolerance in the classroom, pointing to a gap in terms of teacher education. Consequently, this presentation highlights recommendations for teacher education regarding how teachers can develop the skills and knowledge of the range of pedagogical approaches which the teachers in this study suggested they use of promote mutual respect and tolerance. It also explores how teacher education might support and encourage teachers to engage in critical reflection about their own identity in relation to their educational contexts, both in initial teacher education and through ongoing training and development. It is anticipated that this presentation would be of interest to practitioners, teacher educators in higher education and beyond, policy makers and researchers.

Department for Education (2014) *Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools*. Available at:

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Wiggins, S. (2017) *Discursive psychology: theory, method and applications*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

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