

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> Canterbury Christ Church University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education (25)
<b>Title of case study:</b> Investigating a Legitimate Contribution for Religious Faith, Beliefs and Values in Schools
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

This case study outlines the impact of research investigating the character of a legitimate contribution to schools by religious believers. The impact is twofold. Firstly, it has stimulated considerable public debate by offering an influential alternative to those who object to religious contributions in schools. Secondly, it has influenced the classroom work of teachers in church schools by offering a positive rationale and practical model for developing a distinctively Christian approach to pedagogy. The main beneficiaries are Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses, their schools and teachers.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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Our overall research question is: 'In what ways might religious believers legitimately contribute to publicly-funded schools?' This is a question of considerable significance, given that around a third (approximately 7000) of state-funded schools in the UK have religious sponsors and their numbers are increasing as a consequence of the Coalition Government's policies. The research was conducted by members of the Faith, Beliefs and Values research theme group in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU). It was primarily conceptual and analytical with some empirical components, and comprised research undertaken between 2007 and 2012 by Dr Lynn Revell (Reader) and Dr Hazel Bryan (Head of Department) (both CCCU 1997 - present) and between 2010 and 2012 by Professor Trevor Cooling (CCCU 01/05/2010 - present).

The questions investigated in this research were:

1. What are the objections to a distinctively religious contribution to education, what impact do these objections have on teachers who are religiously committed and how can they be countered?
2. Is there a distinctively Christian approach to education that generates an educationally justifiable pedagogy?

Question 1 was first investigated by Revell and Bryan in a study of initial teacher education students in two higher education institutions. They investigated the students' perceptions of the contribution that their personal beliefs might make to their future role as professional Religious Education teachers. The researchers worked with those who self-declared as Christians and those who self-declared as atheists or agnostics. Both groups understood objectivity to be a key professional virtue. However, Christians saw this as problematising their personal beliefs, whereas atheists and agnostics saw it as affirming their personal beliefs since they were not religious. The research questioned the helpfulness of these perceptions of objectivity, since Christian students were over-sensitised as to the place of their beliefs in their professional life, while atheists and agnostics were de-sensitised to the need to treat their own beliefs as controversial. Revell's empirical research offered the evidence that the received interpretation of the 'objectivity' concept is debilitating for Christian teachers.

Question 1 was built on by Cooling in an analytical study of the use of this conception of objectivity in the influential British Humanist Association's (BHA) education policy. This research was stimulated by the increased tempo of the BHA's campaign against faith schools mounted in response to the Free school policy of the Coalition Government elected in May 2010 (<https://humanism.org.uk/campaigns/what-you-can-do-to-help/2012-faith-schools-appeal/>).

Cooling's research was commissioned by *Theos*, the public policy Think Tank founded by the Bible Society, and was carried out and funded after he started his appointment at CCCU. Given its political topicality, *Theos* fast-tracked the research report, *Doing God in Education*, which was published in late December 2010. The research was philosophical and interrogated the view of knowledge and belief underpinning the BHA's publications and website. It challenged the consistency of the BHA's arguments and the policy conclusions derived from them. Cooling's

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report also offered an alternative model of objectivity, which could underpin an educationally legitimate religious contribution.

Question 2 is being investigated by Cooling and Revell in on-going, pedagogically-focused research, *The Impact of Christian Ethos on Teaching and Learning*, which takes the view of knowledge developed in response to the BHA as its starting point and translates this into an approach for use in church schools. The research responds to the stated aspiration of the Christian churches that their schools should be 'distinctively Christian'. It is both theoretical and practical. Phase 1 developed a pedagogical model called *What If Learning* based on a theologically-inspired model of character education, in partnership with Calvin College in the USA. Phase 2 is a current project investigating the implementation of *What If Learning* in three church secondary schools in England.

**3. References to the research**

Bryan, H. and Revell, L. (2011), 'Performativity, faith and professional identity: student religious education teachers and the ambiguity of objectivity.' *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 59(4), 403-419. REF2, CCCU.

Cooling, T. (2010) *Doing God in Education*, London: Theos.

Cooling, T. (2012) 'What is a controversial issue? Implications for the treatment of religious beliefs in education.' *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 33(2), 169-182. REF2, CCCU.

Cooling, T. (2013a) 'The distinctiveness of Christian learning in church schools,' in Worsley, H. (ed.), *Anglican Church School Education: Moving Beyond the First Two Hundred Years*, London: Bloomsbury. REF2, CCCU.

Cooling, T. (2013b) 'Teachers and Christian religious values.' in Arthur, J. & Lovat, T. (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Religion, Education and Values*, London: Routledge. REF2, CCCU.

Cooling, T. (2013c) 'The formation of the Christian teacher: the role of faithfulness to the Bible in conceptualising learning.' In A.B. Morris (ed.), *Re-Imagining Christian Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Chelmsford: Matthew James Publishing. REF 2, CCCU.

**Quality of the Research**

Cooling's publication *Doing God in Education* was selected by peer review as the focus of a keynote symposium at the British Education Research Association (BERA) conference in September 2011. This was subsequently selected by BERA to be its sponsored symposium at the American Educational Research Association in Vancouver in April 2012 and the papers presented in the symposium were published in a Special Issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Oxford Review of Education*: 'Trevor Cooling's *Doing God in Education*', *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(5), 511-566.

Bryan and Revell's article (2011) was subject to peer review for the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, as was Cooling's article (2012) for the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*. Cooling's chapters (all published in 2013) were reviewed by peer reviewers and the editors of the respective books.

**Funding**

£30,000 from Jerusalem Trust for *Christian student religious education teachers* (PI Revell).

£2,000 from Theos for *Doing God in Education* (received February 2011, PI Cooling).

£51,000 from The Stapleford Centre for the *What If Learning* phase 1 project (May 2010-December 2011, PI Cooling).

£195,000 from five charitable trusts for the *What If Learning* phase 2 project (September 2012-August 2014, PI Cooling). The charitable trusts are: Jerusalem Trust (£100,000), Culham St

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Gabriel's Trust (£40,000), a Roman Catholic Trust (£25,000), Hinchley Charitable Trust (£20,000) and Hockerill Educational Foundation (£10,000).

**4. Details of the impact****a) Impact on public debate about the contribution of religion to publicly-funded schools**

Cooling's report on the BHA's education policy, *Doing God in Education*, has had impact of considerable reach and significance on public debate and engagement in the UK with the issues it raises. For example, it was debated at an over-subscribed event organised by the Royal Society of Arts at their London headquarters on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2011. The online video recording of the event (1) has been viewed 10,807 times (accessed 21/10/13). The report was the focus of the BBC World Service programme *Politics UK* (2) on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2012 and of a TES two-page feature on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2011. There has been continuing debate with the BHA, whose CEO and the chair of the Humanist Philosophers' Group, Professor Richard Norman, wrote a joint response for the RSA event. As a result of continuing engagement with Cooling, the BHA withdrew from its public campaigning against the Sevenoaks Christian School (3). Revell's research was featured in Nicky Campbell's BBC documentary (4) at Easter 2010, examining whether Christians are persecuted in the UK.

The impact from *Doing God in Education* has also had international reach. For example it has been translated into Russian (5) and an edited version produced in German for Swiss teachers.

The significance of this impact is that the public discourse surrounding the research has helped create a context where those involved in religiously sponsored schools can be more confident in the validity of their contribution, as illustrated by the independent review posted by a former Chief Executive of the Association of Christian Teachers, who described the report as the 'one book' to read for a Christian standpoint on education (6).

**b) Interim impact on distinctively Christian teaching and learning practice in church schools**

The pedagogical research is disseminated through a website, produced in UK and US versions ([www.whatiflearning.co.uk](http://www.whatiflearning.co.uk) and [www.whatiflearning.com](http://www.whatiflearning.com)) that went live in April 2012. The website is for schools that wish their Christian ethos to shape their teaching and learning by using the approach developed in the phase 1 research. Its impact is significant, albeit interim, in offering these schools a distinctively Christian pedagogy not previously available and thereby providing justification for their claim to promote a Christian ethos in their classrooms.

The usage statistics for the UK site to the end of October 2013 are a total of 11,431 visits from 125 countries with 60,278 page views. Of these, 36% were return visits and the average pages viewed per visit were 5.27. For the US site, the equivalent figures were 15,318 visits from 133 countries with 51,173 page views and 39% return visits, and the average pages viewed per visit were 3.34. The high percentage of return visits and page views per visit indicates sustained use rather than casual visits.

The reach of the *What If Learning* impact has been to a variety of schools, such as Roman Catholic and Adventist denominational schools and individual Free schools. For example, the Church Free secondary school (7), which opened in Sevenoaks in September 2013, is basing its teaching and learning strategy on *What If Learning*. Since joining the University in 2010, Cooling has led events for 20 organisations responsible for groups of schools and is working with three schools in an intensive programme focussed on each school's pedagogical practice. The approach has been particularly influential on the Church of England (8), the largest UK provider of schools with a religious sponsor (nearly 4,600 schools). In March 2013, Cooling organised a training conference for Church of England diocesan education teams wishing to use the approach with their schools. 50 delegates attended representing over 75% of the 43 dioceses. Participants are now setting up training events in their local area and a grant of £27,000 from the Jerusalem Trust has been secured to support this dissemination in 2014. Examples of dioceses running their own *What If Learning* CPD programme are Oxford, York, and Peterborough. In June 2013, a booklet

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designed for Church school head teachers, staff and governors called *Distinctively Christian Learning?* was published by the Association of Anglican Diocesan Directors of Education, so as to offer Church of England schools an accessible introduction to the approach. EdisonLearning (9), the school improvement partner working with the Church of England, is adopting the approach in its work with church schools.

The reach of the impact is also international. For example the Diocese of Sydney has created its own URL address for the website and has an officer whose responsibility is to support schools in using it (10). She is introducing the approach in six schools, with a further six expressing interest. In addition, Cooling has spent two separate weeks in St Andrews Cathedral School in Sydney introducing the staff to *What If Learning*, as well as speaking at a national conference for Christian teachers in Darwin in 2011. In America, Calvin College is conducting its own programme of training for schools in the US and overseas, including Indonesia, Norway, South Korea, and South America.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (1) <http://www.thersa.org/events/audio-and-past-events/2011/is-there-a-place-for-god-in-education> for the video of the panel debate at the RSA.
- (2) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00dwqfb/Politics\\_UK\\_25\\_02\\_2011\\_Doing\\_God\\_in\\_education/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00dwqfb/Politics_UK_25_02_2011_Doing_God_in_education/) for the BBC world Service programme.
- (3) Chief Education Officer, British Humanist Association. **(Contact ID.1)**
- (4) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7540609/BBCs-Nicky-Campbell-Christians-feel-persecuted-by-human-rights-law-and-councils.html> for the programme on Revell's research.
- (5) [http://www.acsi.org.ua/images/Doing\\_God\\_in\\_Education.pdf](http://www.acsi.org.ua/images/Doing_God_in_Education.pdf) to see the Russian translation of *Doing God in Education*.
- (6) <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Doing-God-Education-Trevor-Cooling/dp/0956218237> for an independent review.
- (7) Headteacher, Trinity School, Sevenoaks. **(ContactID.2)**
- (8) Head of School Policy, Church of England. **(Contact ID.3)**
- (9) Managing Director, EdisonLearning. **(Contact ID.4)**
- (10) Director of Education, Anglican Education Commission, Diocese of Sydney. **(Contact ID.5)**