

Advice on Selecting and Using Resources

In 2010 a report was published by the University of Warwick on the materials used in schools to teach about world religions as part of Religious Education (RE).

The study was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and carried out during the academic year 2008-9 by the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit.

Guidance was provided on resources for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. It included an evaluation of the published materials readily available, consideration of the contextual and pedagogical factors that influence their selection and use in schools and classrooms, and the materials' contribution to learning.

A particular focus was on the resources' contribution to education both in terms of their ability to enhance young people's understanding of the principal religions in British society, and in terms of the messages these materials might convey about inter communal, particularly inter religious, harmony and cooperation.

The key findings were as follows:

- There is a wide range of religious education materials to support teaching about the six principal religions, particularly for Key Stages (KS) 1, 2 and 3.
- Books were used as teacher resources in all Key Stages and as sources of pictures and text.
- The survey and the case studies show that teachers draw heavily on web resources and DVDs from the UK and elsewhere. Teachers make creative use of ICT in their lessons using a large amount of material not specifically produced for religious education purposes.
- The promotion of community cohesion is rarely addressed explicitly in RE materials but is dependent on teachers drawing out community cohesion messages from the content of the RE lesson.
- Case studies showed that school responses to the community cohesion agenda are various including learning about differences, transforming life chances, community partnerships and social action. In different schools links are made between RE and all of these areas.
- Much of the material used in RE lessons is generated by the teachers themselves using a mixture of electronic, print and other resources many of which were not specifically produced for RE purposes.
- The development of personal and social values, of positive attitudes towards those of other religions, and of critical thinking, was given higher priority in religious education than knowledge about religions by the majority of teachers in the case study schools.
- Religious learning in schools has various forms and expressions other than formal RE.
- There are opportunities (at some schools more than others) to learn about religions through cross-curricular themes, use of visits and visitors, local partnerships (e.g. with parish churches or other schools) and collective worship.
- Reviewers of materials pointed out that the value of RE materials for increasing understanding of the six principal religions is often compromised by inaccuracy, imbalance and lack of depth in their portrayal.
- Reviewers suggested a number of criteria for teachers to assess the representation of religions to ensure that their integrity is respected and that student understanding is enhanced. These included ensuring: accuracy in the portrayal of the religion; recognition of each religion's

complexity and internal diversity; acknowledgement of the spiritual / numinous; a sense of the religion as living and contemporary.

- Reviewers suggested that books should establish points of contact with their intended readers in the following ways: use contemporary issues and reliable sources to engage pupils; offer a variety of source materials with which pupils of different abilities might engage, e.g. invite interaction with the text and pictures; provide sufficient contextual information for stories and pictures; enhance accessibility through clear design; provide a balance between learning about and learning from religions.
- The availability of many free web-based resources means that teachers and students need to be able to become critical evaluators of materials and assess them for authenticity, content, ease of navigation and provenance.



[The full report is available here](#)