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Contact-based interfaith programmes in schools and the changing religious education landscape: negotiating a worldviews curriculum

Lucy Peacock

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the implications of a proposed move towards a religion and worldviews curriculum in England for contact-based interfaith programmes in schools, through a case study of the Faith and Belief Forum's School Linking programme. Quantitative and qualitative data collected through 1,488 teacher and student surveys, teacher focus groups and participant observation in schools reveal that despite students reporting an increase in religious knowledge after taking part in School Linking, the type of knowledge gained does not accurately capture the religious and world-view plurality of the programme's participants. In positioning School Linking's theoretical underpinnings of intergroup contact theory as driving this issue, the article proposes an alternative theoretical grounding for interfaith programmes in schools, the 'deategorization' model of contact. Interfaith programmes as communicated through deategorization ensures that such extra-curricular activities explore religious and non-religious worldviews in their complexity and complement students' learning developed through a religion and worldviews curriculum.

KEYWORDS

Interfaith; religious education; schools; worldviews; intergroup contact; decategorization

Introduction

This article addresses how contact-based interfaith programmes in schools might engage with, respond and adapt to the changing religious education (RE) landscape in England. It draws upon my 2016–2020 mixed methods research into the case study of the Faith and Belief Forum's (F&BF's) School Linking programme, an extra-curricular initiative which trains teachers in interfaith dialogue facilitation skills and brings students from different schools together to creatively engage with questions around religion, identity and community. In this article, I explore how the type of religious knowledge reportedly developed by students taking part in School Linking aligns with a proposed shift towards a religion and worldviews curriculum (CoRE 2018). My research illustrates that whilst students report an increase in religious knowledge after participating in School Linking's interfaith activities, the knowledge they gain during the teacher-facilitated activities risks

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being oversimplistic and, whilst perhaps appropriate for teaching and examination in current RE frameworks, inhibits students from sophisticatedly engaging with religious and worldview plurality.

School Linking methods and activities do not inherently encourage this type of simplistic religious knowledge. On the contrary, they are designed to explore the diversity of religious and non-religious belief. However, that teachers and students tend to adopt language of stereotypes when discussing religion during School Linking reflects the programme's theoretical foundation of intergroup contact theory (Brown and Hewstone 2005; Hewstone and Brown 1986) and its requirement that individuals taking part in the counter encounter be 'typical' of the group they represent (Pettigrew 2009). In light of current RE discourse, I propose in this article that interfaith programmes in schools adopt an alternative model of contact theory, the 'decategorization' model to maximise compatibility with a religion and worldviews curriculum.

Background: a move towards worldviews in schools

The question of how religious and non-religious worldviews might be authentically taught in RE have been the cause of ongoing debate since the Commission on religious education's (CoRE's) report, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (CoRE 2018).¹ The report, which captures the views of multiple groups including teachers, secondary school pupils and faith community representatives, recommends that the subject title 'RE' be amended to 'Religion and Worldviews' (CoRE 2018, 3–4) and that, correspondingly, RE teaching be adapted to reflect the religious and worldview plurality of its students. Defining 'worldview' as 'a person's way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world' (CoRE 2018, 26), the report explores how 'worldviews', as a concept which encompasses religious and non-religious perspectives, can be used as a pedagogical tool to explore other academic disciplines and shape discourse within and beyond the classroom. The report distinguishes between 'institutional worldviews', defined as 'organised worldviews shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions' and which includes both religious and non-religious perspectives, and 'personal worldviews' which represent 'an individual's own way of understanding and living in the world, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional worldviews' (CoRE 2018, 4).

This twofold classification of 'worldviews' reflects a previous conceptualisation of the term by van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema (2013), who recognise that within the Dutch RE classroom, 'personal' and 'organised' worldviews 'influence schools in different manners' (2013, 222). The suggestion to move towards a worldviews-based curriculum framework, however, has provoked debate. The suggested move has been praised as a welcome one by the RE Council of England and Wales (Religious Education Council 2018), a majority in a 2018 House of Lords debate (House of Lords 2018) and online by academics (Casley 2019; Dinham 2019; Flanagan 2019). Despite this, ambiguity remains around what a pedagogical shift towards the teaching of worldviews might look like in practice.

There is a growing body of work in the sociology of religion that points to the challenges involved in the classification of 'personal worldviews'. Academic research has positioned belief as increasingly individualised, such as Davie's (1990, 1994)

'believing without belonging' framework or Woodhead and Heelas' (2005) research positing a shift from organised religion to 'individualised spiritualities'. Moreover, research into young people and non-religiosity emphasises the intersectionality of identity formation; Madge, Hemming and Stenson's (2014) large-scale mixed methods *Youth on Religion* project explored how religious and non-religious identities are formed through 'age, gender, socio-economic status, family, friends, geographical location, school, media, religious leaders and world events' (2014, 23). Recent work by Strhan and Shillitoe (2019) highlights the interplay of school, family and personal reflection in the intergenerational transmission of non-religious identity.

Alongside the complex task of categorising 'personal worldviews', there are pedagogical constraints. Everington's (2018) qualitative research with 25 RE teachers in England highlighted several challenges to the effective teaching of non-religious worldviews, including limited resources, time constraints and a lack of sophisticated understanding of the nature of the 'non-religious' for specialist and non-specialist teachers. Her findings support Dinham and Shaw's (2015) claim that RE teachers experience pressure to conform and adapt to changes in England's religio-cultural landscape. Moreover, the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE 2017, 36) is concerned that without specialist training, teachers risk 'perpetuating inaccuracies about religions or beliefs'.

Cooling, Chair of the RE Council of England and Wales, recently cautioned that the CoRE report should be read not as the 'final word', but 'a useful direction' (Cooling 2021). CoRE's ongoing 'Worldview Project' addresses the multiple interpretations of 'worldview' to provide clarity on its relevance to RE. The project's future direction seeks to explore more explicitly how the concepts introduced in the original report might influence RE syllabuses across England (Cooling 2021). The report has similarly laid the foundations for further examination, with the edited volume *Reforming RE* (Chater 2020) dedicated to exploring the implications of the report for school practice, drawing on a range of academic and professional perspectives. The progress in determining how a worldviews paradigm might, in practice, shape RE teaching is encouraging. Nevertheless, scholars have failed to acknowledge the potential broader implications of this paradigmatic shift; this article puts forward the first empirical evidence of its kind to explore how a move towards a religion and worldviews curriculum in schools might impact extra-curricular faith-based activities that primarily operate *outside* of the RE classroom.

Contact theory: a framework for interfaith work in schools

Numerous initiatives exist that seek to further students' understanding of religious diversity in schools, some intimately linked with RE syllabuses. The project 'Exploring Religious Diversity: What does it mean to follow a faith in Britain today?', conducted by North Yorkshire's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), sought to further students' awareness of religious plurality through a series of school workshops facilitated by faith community representatives. 'Diversity Champions' were also identified among students, who delivered their own events to their peers in school (Westhill Endowment 2021). The 'Ambassadors of Faith and Belief' programme, which operates in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Redbridge in collaboration

with charity RE Today, encourages presentations by specially trained sixth form students who discuss the ways faith shapes their lives (RE Today 2021). Elsewhere, curricula are used as a tool to further interfaith relationships between young people. Since 2007, for example, the ‘Shared Education’ initiative has been operating in Northern Ireland to establish partnerships between Protestant, Roman Catholic and religiously integrated schools. Shared Education brings students from different schools together in cooperative working for lessons designed and evaluated jointly by the schools’ respective teachers. The scheme is designed to promote sustained interaction between students of diverse religion and belief backgrounds, with the joint lessons taking place as often as once a week for more than a year (Loader 2016). In 2016, the adoption of the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) ensured legislative provision for the initiative across the country.

Other programmes retain links to their respective RE syllabuses but deliver predominantly extra-curricular activities. F&BF’s School Linking programme, which runs in London and Birmingham, is a prime example, and was the focus of the research upon which this article is based. Each academic year, F&BF staff deliver three continuing professional development (CPD) days at which teachers who have signed up to the programme are trained in interfaith dialogue facilitation skills. Concurrently, two teachers from different schools are ‘linked’ for the academic year, and jointly deliver three ‘Link Days’ in which their respective classes come together for creative activities. The Link Days examine three questions: ‘Who am I?’ (identity), ‘Who are we?’ (belonging and community), and ‘Where do we live and how do we live together?’ (citizenship and society). Link Day 1 takes place at a neutral venue, with subsequent days hosted by the teachers’ respective schools. As stated on the School Linking website, the goal of the programme is ‘to equip more learners with the skills and tools they need to handle and influence relations between different faiths and beliefs’.

The premise of School Linking has its roots in policy discourse surrounding school segregation and ‘community cohesion’, defined as ‘what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together’ (DCLG 2008, 10). The concept of ‘school twinning’ was recommended for schools as one of the (much contested, see e.g. Shannahan 2017) Cantle Report’s² ‘immediate steps [...] to address the problems of monocultural schools’ (Home Office 2001, 35). For Cantle and likeminded commentators, one ‘problem’ of such schools is that the absence of interfaith contact between young people supposedly contributes to social division (Casey 2016; Ouseley 2001). Opponents of faith schools, that is, schools with a religious character, draw upon language of contact theory to illustrate their arguments. The theoretical model of ‘intergroup contact’ (developed by Hewstone and Brown 1986 and revisited by Brown and Hewstone 2005; Pettigrew 1998) is grounded in Allport’s (1954) ‘contact hypothesis’, which, put simply, states that interaction between groups leads to a decrease in prejudiced attitudes. Allport proposed that four conditions make contact more likely to reduce prejudice: equal status, common goal(s), cooperation and institutional support. In the decades following Allport’s contact hypothesis, a body of psychological and social-psychological research into intergroup contact’s effectiveness at combatting prejudice (see e.g. Pettigrew and Tropp’s [2006] meta-analysis of 515 intergroup contact studies) has provided empirical evidence to support its development into an influential and applied theory.

In relation to interfaith contact, Breen (2009), in his defence of faith schooling, conceded that in theory '[a]ccording to the contact hypothesis, faith schools, by necessarily dividing children by religion, are inclined to be disconnected from ethnic and religious diversity within their wider social contexts' (2009, 104). It comes as no surprise, then, that the concept of 'school twinning' has its theoretical grounding in intergroup contact. Following a pilot twinning project by the then Labour government in 2007, twinning, or linking, projects expanded. As of 2020, The Linking Network (TLN) oversees 28 programmes in England with 30,000 children in 1,063 classes participating. F&BF's School Linking is one such programme. In 2017, former F&BF staff in collaboration with TLN, wrote in support of TLN's contribution to 'an integral part of a wider strategic plan to strengthen community cohesion' (British Academy 2017, 43).

Evaluations of TLN framed their findings within contact theory. Raw's (2006) mixed methods evaluation found that linking had a 'dramatic' impact on the number of students' cross-cultural friendships, often cited as the 'ideal' outcome of contact (Brown and Hewstone 2005; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006),³ per student. A government-funded mixed methods evaluation of TLN (Kerr et al. 2011) found that linking developed students' 'knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes, dispositions and behaviours, particularly those concerning self-confidence and self-efficacy' (2011, 7). Shannahan's (2018) participatory action research evaluation described a 'multidimensional' (2018, 39) positive impact of linking, including greater levels of self-confidence, empathy and appreciation of diversity among students.

If such interfaith programmes only engage schools with a religious character, which, depending on how they are funded and controlled, may not be required to follow a locally agreed RE syllabus, what does this have to do with a proposed move towards the proposed 'Religion and Worldviews' curriculum? A great deal, since in recent years programmes have widened their reach to other school types. This can be seen with School Linking; since 2016, the language used to communicate the programme's aims has evolved as the programme has expanded its participation base from exclusively schools with a religious character, to include community schools⁴ which follow local RE syllabuses. Indeed, RE teachers make up a large proportion of School Linking teachers, and the programme is framed on F&BF's website as helping schools with 'SMSC and British Values provision' and providing teachers 'with activities and ideas relevant to RE and PHSCE teaching'. Alongside the broadening of School Linking to encompass schools without a religious character, and in the same year that the CoRE's report on religion and worldviews was published, the charity rebranded itself The Faith and Belief Forum (formally Three Faiths Forum). As stated on its website, the purpose of the rebranding was to 'clearly communicate that we are completely inclusive and welcome to people of all faiths and beliefs, whether religious or not'. As School Linking seeks to widen its reach, appeal to different school types and enhance its use of language around religious plurality, it must engage with the changing RE landscape. This article does just that; by applying empirical evidence about the nature of School Linking to the concept of worldviews, it reveals that the common framing of interfaith linking programmes as grounded in intergroup contact is incompatible with teaching and learning around religious plurality.

Methodology

The research upon which this article is based comes from a wider study, conducted from 2016–2020, which aimed to determine how the case study of F&BF's School Linking programme informed or inhibited 'peaceful relations' in schools at interpersonal and institutional levels, before reflectively reassessing the concept of 'peaceful relations' itself through the lens of contact theory.

Data were collected and analysed in two distinct phases. The first considered the impact that could be captured from secondary data provided by F&BF. Statistical analysis was conducted in quantitative analysis software SPSS on 1,488 survey documents designed by F&BF and completed by students and teachers in 2016–2017. The School Linking participants consisted of 52 classes from 45 English schools representing different religious ethes; more than a third (36.5%) of students taking part came from Muslim schools, a quarter (25%) from Church of England or Catholic schools and almost a quarter (23.1%) from Jewish schools. The remaining 15.4% included two schools with a Sikh ethos, two schools with a Greek Orthodox ethos, one school with a Hindu ethos, and, for this first time since the programme's inception, three community schools with no religious character. 34 of the 52 classes were from primary schools and 17 from secondary schools. Students were aged between 6 and 14 years.

The 1,488 documents comprised 777 'baseline' surveys, completed by students before taking part in School Linking, 260 'endpoint' surveys completed by the students at the end of School Linking, 61 surveys completed by class teachers involved in the programme and 390 'student reflection forms', documents which a selection of students were asked to complete at the end of individual programme activities by F&BF staff. The responses were largely representative of the schools taking part, however students from Muslim schools were slightly underrepresented and students from Jewish and Church of England schools slightly overrepresented.

Phase 2 of the research was concerned with primary data collected through qualitative methods in the 2017–18 academic year to assess *how* School Linking shapes 'peaceful relations' in schools. Six CPD days training teachers in interfaith dialogue facilitation were observed, and participant observation of School Linking activities was undertaken in four secondary schools in north and east London (a Church of England school paired with an all girls' Muslim school, and a Jewish school paired with an all boys' Muslim school). Seven focus group interviews were conducted with class teachers involved in the programme in April 2018, with discussion questions based on the findings of an open-ended survey distributed to the participants at the start of the programme in October 2017.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of the primary data was undertaken in qualitative analysis software, NVivo. The thematic analysis was performed inductively, outside of a presumed theoretical framework, and with additional analytic insight provided by adopting a 'double reflexive' approach (Knauth and Vieregge 2019). An analytic tool in education research, the process of double reflexivity recognises that 'social actors in a school context (teachers, students, administrators) have a reflexive knowledge of their daily actions, which ethnographic researchers can reconstruct and translate into their own concepts' (2019, 32). That the perceptions, knowledge and interpretations of multiple actors interrelate presupposes an inherent relationship between research, theory

and practice, ensuring that the research findings respond to and reflect the context of School Linking. I identified three overarching themes: 1) teachers’ and schools’ practical approaches to implementing School Linking, 2) interpersonal relationships as shaped by space and power dynamics, and 3) the ways in which the framing of School Linking influences the development of religious knowledge. This article considers the third theme.

Findings

An initial exploration of the student baseline and endpoint surveys designed and disseminated by F&BF in 2016–17 found that students’ reported ‘knowledge of the faiths and beliefs’ of the school with which they were linked considerably improved during School Linking. Students’ responses to the Likert scale statement of ‘I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of my Link School’ increased from a median score of 3 out of 5 at baseline to 4 out of 5 at endpoint (with 1 represented by a picture of a sad face and 5 a picture of a happy face).⁵ As Figure 1 illustrates, at the start of the programme almost half of the 761 students who responded disagreed with the statement, scoring a 1 or a 2. At the end of the programme, the trend line inverted; half of the 257 students who completed an endpoint survey scored a 4 or a 5, and just 5% scored a 1.⁶ There was a positive correlation between agreeing with this Likert scale statement and other statements. As students reportedly learned more about the faiths and beliefs of their linked school, they reported feeling more confident working with, and talking to, the

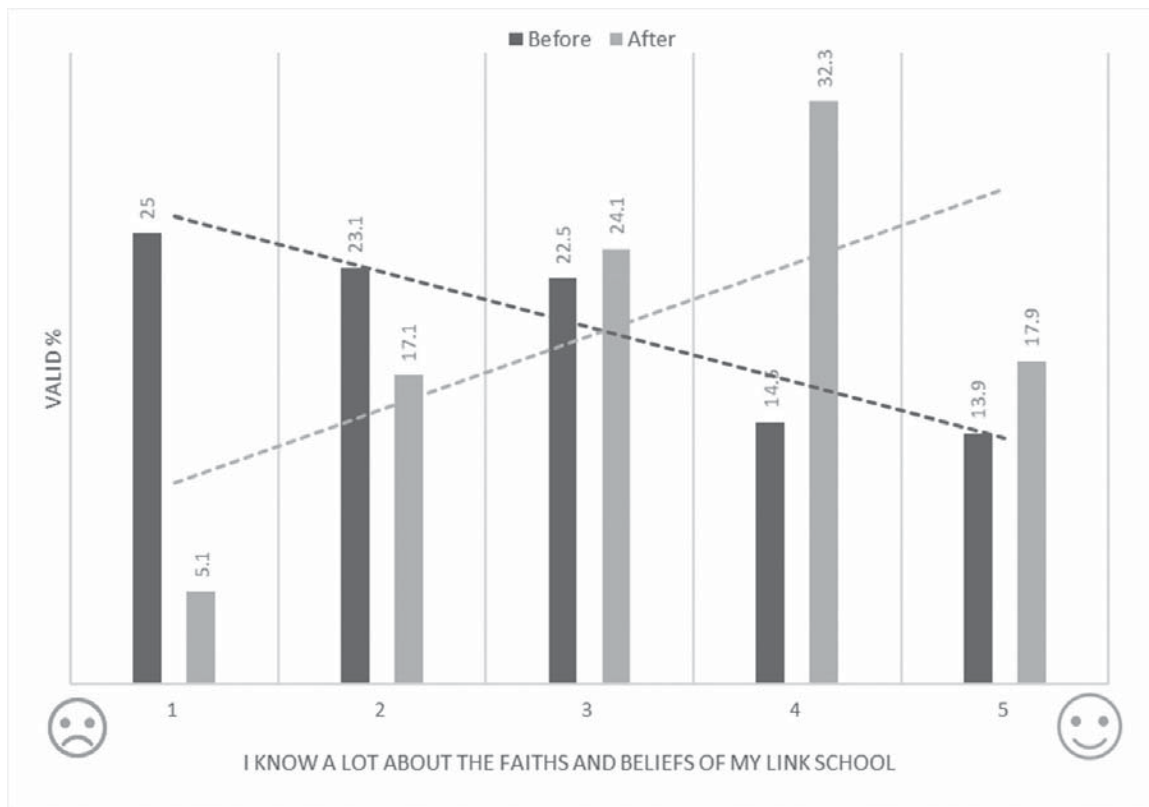


Figure 1. A comparison of student’s reported knowledge about the ‘faith and beliefs of their link school’ before and after school linking.

students from the linked school, and reported feeling that the linked students were similar to them and interested in them.⁷ This finding supports previous research, which found that knowledge is a key outcome in studies of young people's attitudes to religious diversity (Arweck and Ipgrave 2017). For example, Jackson (2014) states that '[f]or students, peaceful co-existence depends on knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews'.

Analysis of Likert scale scores alone cannot reveal the *type* of knowledge gained by the students. The student reflection form asked students to provide examples of what they had learned about 'the faith or belief of someone else'. The 367 responses to this question were coded into ten categories, with the themes of 'worship' and 'practices' the most common (42%). Typical responses across the ten categories revealed students largely gained generic factual knowledge. Typical examples in the 'worship' category were, 'Muslims pray five times a day' and 'Buddhists pray at a temple'. Examples in the 'practices' category included, 'Hindus eat only veg' and 'They [Muslims] eat halal meat'. Comparison between responses within the same class revealed inaccuracies. Three students wrote: 'Catholics and Christians are different', 'I didn't know that Catholics and Christians are not the same' and 'Catholicism is similar to Christianity'. Nuanced examples were rare, but recognised the plurality of contemporary religious practice, such as 'some people in the Jewish faith still do Xmas'. Overall, the examples suggest that students develop a type of knowledge that is based on oversimplified or inaccurate 'facts', undermining the initial positive finding of the Likert scale analysis.

The primary data were analysed to explore the contradictions of the secondary data analysis findings. Teacher focus groups and participant observation of Link Days in London secondary schools revealed that teacher-led question and answer sessions reinforced a form of religious knowledge among students that overlooked the reality of religious diversity. Teachers' language tended to homogenise faith communities, as well as the student bodies of schools with religious characters.

Teachers shared in the focus groups type of questions that were posed during Link Days:

In our school, children asked a lot of questions to the Sikh students. Why the long hair? Why the turban? A lot of questions like that, which they've never had an answer to before. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

[O]ur group had a question and answer session with each other [...] it was more the fundamentals of the faith that they asked about [...] core beliefs, and why certain practices are held. Like, why do people use rosary beads? Why do they wear the hijab? Why do they cover themselves? (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

These questions echoed those given as examples by students when they were asked in the 2016–17 endpoint survey to share what they had asked the students from their Link School. Typical examples were, 'why do they wear those hat things?', 'why do you cover up?', and 'why do you not cut your hair?' Similar questions were observed during Link Day activities. Examples from observation fieldnotes included:

Student: What is Islam's rule on homosexuality?

Teacher: It is fundamentally wrong. But if someone chooses it, you respect their choice.

Student: Why do you pray five times a day?

Student: Our book says if someone prays five times a day then we can live sin-free.

Student: What is Islam's opinion of the role of women?

Student: They can do anything they want. There is no discrimination, as long as they follow Allah [the teacher proceeded to clarify this response, explaining that women cannot lead male prayer. He also said that the perception that the woman stays at home while the husband works is generally correct].

Whilst questions such as these might serve to satisfy young people's curiosity about each other, short responses presented as fact risk mirroring 'formulaic, or potentially inadequate, answers' (Conroy 2015, 179), or 'reducing complex issues [...] to simplistic pre-coached answers' (Dinham and Francis 2015, 21). Some teachers explicitly framed the question and answer sessions as part of RE teaching. During the second Link Day between a Church of England school and a Muslim school, observation fieldnotes recorded a teacher's announcement that, 'everything we've covered here will be part of your GCSEs in six months' time'. This was unsurprising; when teachers were asked in F&BF's surveys why they were taking part in School Linking, response included, 'Raises the profile of the RE department at school' (Roman Catholic-ethos school) and 'Support study of RS' (community school). The type for religious knowledge instilled by teachers, however, whilst perhaps appropriate for current teaching and examination frameworks, fails to sufficiently capture the complexity of contexts which inform students' religious and non-religious worldviews.

Within the teacher focus groups, this oversimplified form of religious knowledge was most strongly exhibited by a community school teacher, who was surprised to learn of religious plurality within schools with religious characters:

Community school teacher: My knowledge of Judaism isn't, I wouldn't say, amazing [...] And I'm guessing, every Jewish school has slightly different ways ...

Muslim school teacher: Well that's like with Muslims too! Every Muslim school, they have different ways as well.

Community school teacher: Okay, I didn't know that either.

The same teacher appeared to assume that her community school students were exclusively non-religious:

I feel like we have nothing to bring to the table regarding faith because we're not a faith school. So we're going to them next and we could be watching their prayers, learning more about the religion. They are going to give [...] the religious side.

This finding offers an alternative perspective to researchers' depictions of community schools as ideal sites for interfaith learning by virtue of their inherent religious diversity (Arweck 2017; Jackson 2003); it reminds us of the key role that teachers play as facilitators of students' learning around religion and belief and supports calls for specialist training for teachers in this subject area.

In sum, closer examination of the type of knowledge reportedly developed by students taking part in School Linking reveals that it is largely based on generic and/or stereotypical facts. Primary data point to this type of knowledge being exacerbated by teacher-led question and answer sessions, some of which were positioned by teachers as being part of students' RE learning. These sessions further revealed a naivety around religious and worldview diversity among teachers, particularly those representing the community schools taking part in School Linking for the first time.

Discussion: the 'secondary transfer effect' as incompatible with a worldviews paradigm

The previous section served to demonstrate that the type of religious knowledge reportedly developed among students taking part in School Linking is based upon oversimplified generic 'facts'. Whilst this knowledge might suffice for current RE frameworks, it overlooks religious plurality. This issue is exacerbated when one considers School Linking's theoretical grounding in intergroup contact. Namely, a key feature of the contact theory model, the 'secondary transfer effect', is fundamentally incompatible with School Linking as delivered in relation to a worldviews curriculum.

The 'secondary transfer effect' is based upon the claim that when contact with an 'outgroup' member reduces one's prejudiced attitude, the transformed attitude can be generalised to the outgroup as a whole. In other words, a more positive attitude can extend to other outgroup members who did not take part in the original contact (Pettigrew 2009). Research on the interfaith work of Shared Education in Northern Ireland through the lens of contact theory has built upon this principle, emphasising that for students' attitudes to generalise to other outgroup members, 'group salience' must be present (Stringer et al. 2009). This is achieved by structuring the contact so that the individuals taking part are perceived to be representative or typical of their 'group' (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013). For a student taking part in School Linking, their 'group' may be framed as 'Muslims', or 'Jewish school students', for example.

The worth of a contact theory model with innate assumptions of generalisability is, I would argue, questionable when it comes to interfaith programmes in schools. Whilst a generalisation principle is appealing for organisations that wish to demonstrate the reach of their impact, the precondition of group salience is problematic if programmes operate alongside a religion and worldviews curriculum. A worldviews paradigm questions the notion of typicality and emphasises the complexity and diversity of religions and worldviews, but the intergroup contact model closes complexity down.

I propose that interfaith programmes that operate in schools consider an alternative model of contact that does not rely on the 'secondary transfer effect'. Brewer and Miller's (1984, 1988; Miller 2002) 'decategorization' model offers a good alternative. It structures the contact encounter 'so as to reduce the salience of available social categories and increase the likelihood of a more "interpersonal" mode of thinking and behaving' (Brown and Hewstone 2005, 262). The decategorization contact model seeks to break down the process of social categorisation through questioning perceptions of group homogeneity and exchanging individualised information, thereby diluting group salience.⁸

The model's avoidance of the problems associated with the secondary transfer effect produces additional benefits. It intrinsically recognises religious and worldview plurality within schools as well as between them; by challenging the tendency to present School Linking classes as inherent 'in' and 'out' groups, it offers linking programmes the opportunity to explore intrafaith contact between schools of the same religious character, or two community schools. In Parker-Jenkins and Glenn's (2011, 8) words, "The "Other" in this case may be within as well as beyond a religious tradition". Moreover, this approach is sympathetic to the needs of community school teachers, who, as my research found, may be predisposed to communicating religious and non-religious beliefs as overtly homogenous. As interfaith programmes increasingly engage community schools, they will be required to navigate the changing RE landscape, and conceptualising the interfaith contact encounter via decategorisation may be best placed to meet the complexities of this discursive shift.

Conclusion

This argument is a first step in recognising the key role that interfaith programmes play in the development of students' knowledge and understanding of religious and worldview plurality. Interfaith programmes must consider how the implicit framing of their theoretical underpinnings influence the ways in which the programmes are interpreted and delivered. Despite School Linking activities being designed to explore religious plurality, the ways in which they are delivered by teachers risk encouraging the development of oversimplified religious knowledge. To mitigate this risk, it is essential that interfaith programmes' theoretical groundings align with their methods and are communicated to those facilitating the activities (during School Linking teacher training, for example). Moreover, just as interfaith programmes must engage with the changing RE landscape, academics and other contributors to religion and worldviews discourse must not disregard the influence that extra-curricular interfaith programmes have on young peoples' school experiences and the development of students' attitudes towards religious and worldview diversity.

Notes

1. The Commission was established in 2016 by (but independently of) The RE Council of England and Wales to research and outline a vision for the future of RE and its contribution to education and policy.
2. Commissioned in 2001 to explore and determine the cause of disturbances, including rioting in cities including Bradford, Burnley and Oldham.
3. Research evaluating Northern Ireland's Shared Education programme through the lens of contact theory reflects this finding. For example, Hughes et al. (2012) found that taking part increases students' number of outgroup friends as well as lessening intergroup anxiety.
4. Community schools in England are described by the UK Government as, 'sometimes called local authority maintained schools [...] which] are not influenced by business or religious groups and follow the national curriculum' (Gov.uk 2020).
5. Mann-Whitney U test, $P = .000$.
6. Notably, the surveys asked students about knowledge of the 'Link School', rather than the students within the school. This may suggest that the survey wording was not reviewed in 2016 before community schools were introduced to the programme alongside schools with religious characters. The phrasing is open to the misinterpretation that all students at

a school with a religious character self-ascribe to that religion. Research shows this is not the case (Hemming and Roberts 2018). The survey wording itself, then, risks misrepresenting the religious plurality of the student body.

7. Correlation Coefficients .244, .255, .420 and .458, $P = .000$, $N = 255-256$.
8. Of course, complete 'decategorization' would abolish all group identity, an issue addressed in early iterations of the model (Brewer 1988).

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Notes on contributor

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