

The emergence of philosophy in Scottish secondary school Religious Education

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This article considers changes in the subject Religious Education (RE) within the context of Scottish secondary schools, charting a development towards the increasing use of philosophical skills and content. Before considering the nature, extent and timing of this development this article provides a broader context within which to understand educational change in Scotland. The emergent hypothesis is that Religious Education has become more philosophical as a result of changes in society (particularly secularisation), changes in education (particularly the move to reflective pedagogy), and also as a result of the close epistemological relationship between philosophy and religious education. This article adopts an interpretative research paradigm and considers quantitative and qualitative data drawn from a survey of 126 secondary schools and seventeen key informant interviews. Taken alongside existing reviews of policy and research literature this data demonstrate that three interlinked hypothetical strands have been at the heart of the move towards more philosophical Religious Education, although other possibilities are also raised and considered. This study also suggests areas for further research based on the above findings.

Die totstandkoming van filosofie in die Religeuse Onderwys in Skotse sekondêre skole. Hierdie artikel bestudeer die veranderings ten opsigte van Religeuse Onderwys in die konteks van Skotse sekondêre skole. Dit vermeld ook die ontwikkeling aangaande die toenemende gebruik van filosofiese vaardighede en inhoud. Voordat die aard, omvang en tydsberekening van hierdie ontwikkeling oorweeg word, bied die artikel 'n wyer konteks waarin die veranderings in Skotse onderwys verstaan moet word. Die hipotese wat ontwikkel word, is dat verandering in die samelewing (veral sekularisasie) en in onderwys (veral die beweging na reflektiewe onderwysleer), sowel as die noue epistemologiese band tussen filosofie en religieuse onderwys 'n meer filosofiese aard aan religieuse onderwys verleen. Hierdie artikel maak gebruik van 'n interpretatiewe navorsingsparadigma en oorweeg kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe inligting wat verkry is deur 'n opname waaraan 126 sekondêre skole deelgeneem het en deur onderhoude met sewentien sleutelinformante. Wanneer hierdie data tesame met bestaande beleidsondersoeke en wetenskaplike literatuur oorweeg word, toon dit aan dat drie hipotetiese komponente wat onderling aan mekaar verbind is, die kern van die beweging na meer filosofiese Religeuse Onderwys vorm, hoewel ander moontlikhede ook geopper en oorweeg word. Op grond van bogenoemde bevindings stel hierdie artikel ook verdere navorsingsareas voor.

The Scottish context

Osborne (1968) argues that three traditions are key to understanding changes in Scottish education. These are the academic tradition which has led to the persistence of a broad liberal curriculum (also posited by Paterson 2008b), the democratic voice (which has sought to ensure an egalitarianism of access to education) (also posited by Davie 1961), and the transmission of culture. Paterson (2008b) argues that we can trace the evolution of these traditions ultimately to the Reformation and that it has persisted with a conviction that Scotland did these things better than anyone else:

Whatever the accuracy of this conviction as historical description, there is no doubt that promoting opportunity offered a guide to policy and to debates about policy throughout the twentieth century. (n.p.)

For Osborne (1968) one legacy of the Reformation, the parish schools, fulfilled the purpose of acting as a stepping stone to gain entrance to the university and access to liberal education and its emancipatory possibilities. Anderson (2008) argues that Scottish education has served an important role as preserver of identity in the face of possible assimilation into the English educational system. The early achievement of a high degree of literacy and an independent and 'precocious' (Anderson 2008:205) university system are hallmarks of Scottish education. For Anderson these were founded on the myth of the lad o' pairs, the tradition that all children, irrespective of social class, should have access to the highest form of academic study.

Philosophy, according to Davie, had a special place in Scottish education: 'This predominance of Philosophy over the other subjects made the educational system in Scotland so different from

that found in England' (1961:13). Davie goes on to suggest that philosophy was given the role of *primus inter pares* (first amongst equals); a subject which allowed pupils and students to navigate and make sense of other subject areas offered (Davie 1961). Paterson (2000) argues that the autonomy of Scottish Universities and their placing philosophy at the core of the curriculum led to the Scottish contribution to the Enlightenment.

Key institutions with regard to the delivery of Scottish education were the parish school and the liberal university. John Knox's 1560 vision of a school in every parish was one in which the students attending would gain a rounded education which balanced their vocational and academic abilities and tendencies. The central aim of the parish school was to be unequivocally religious:

Children must either proceed to further knowledge, or else they must be sent to some handicraft, or to some other profitable exercise; provided always, that first they have the form of knowledge of Christian religion. (n.p.)

In a very real sense Scottish education kept its distinctiveness because of its religious origins. After 1707 (the Union of the Scottish and English parliaments) education would be a means to preserve Presbyterianism (Pickard & Dobie 2003). For Paterson 'it [*the Church*] became in effect the national Parliament so far as school education was concerned' (2000:11).

Davie (1994) argues in similar vein:

Scotland is a region which has lacked its own resident head of state since 1603 and which has had no legislative assembly since 1707, leaving only the legal system, the national church and the educational system as the institutional carriers of national consciousness. (p. 17)

The Church, therefore, has had a great deal of influence on the content and structure of Scottish education. Indeed, the egalitarianism of Scottish education may, in part, be the result of the notion of the *congregatio fidelium* of the reformed church which set itself against the perceived elitism of the Roman Catholic tradition. Osborne (1968:126) argues that in Scotland 'public and Presbyterian are practically interchangeable terms'. However, it is important to acknowledge that in some areas of Scotland Roman Catholic schools constitute a significant minority; they are attended by around 20% of pupils (McKinney 2008).

The influence of the Church of Scotland can be discerned in curricular guidelines for Religious Education. These were provided from 1929 to 1970 by the Scottish Joint Committee on Religious Education. This committee was founded to oversee and provide guidelines and exemplification for Religious Education and it published a number of curricula in this period. The committee represented the joining of the Church of Scotland and the Educational Institute for Scotland.

In the 19th century the influence of the churches on education was contested for the first time. This manifested itself in two ways. Firstly there were the voices of secularist thinkers who wished to divorce religion from education (Paterson 2000). Secondly, there was the more pressing fact that the churches could no longer financially afford the burgeoning upkeep

of schools. This situation was no doubt made worse by the 1843 schism in the church, Pickard and Dobie suggesting that beyond the 1843 disruption 'sectarian factionalism thwarted educational reform' (2003:6). Pickard and Dobie go further, suggesting that 'from 1850 until the Education Act of 1872, which set up school boards and a Scotch Education Department (SED), Scottish politics were dominated by the resistance of the churches to losing their role in the spiritual development of young people' (Pickard & Dobie 2003:5).

The 1872 Education Act sought to remove schools from Church control (at least financially). This Act, however, was created out of the conviction (of politicians and churchmen alike) that although there was a loss of fiscal influence, there would be no parallel diminishment of theological influence. This conviction was based on the view that Scottish society was unalterably and monolithically Christian in character and that this should be reflected in the classroom (Bruce 2002).

Since the Reformation, therefore, religion and education in Scotland have been intertwined. John Knox's 1560 *Common Book of Discipline*, his Presbyterian manifesto for a system of parish, church-governed schools in Scotland, made clear the need for access to vocational and/or academic learning. What he made even clearer, however, was that this aspiration would be secondary to catechism in reformed church doctrine. Over the next three centuries the parish school system Knox had envisaged largely preserved Scottish national consciousness in the absence of a parliament. In addition, its meritocratic philosophy contributed to Scottish education's self-image and mythology, according to which the lad o'pairs (the child from any background) could access any level of education.

The 1872 Education Act created a national system of compulsory elementary schools. This legislation effectively sanctioned the creation of a secular school curriculum. However, the 1872 Act also furnished schools with a statement of support for mandatory religious instruction and religious observance which continues to the present day. It also provides the first mention of a conscience clause for parents, giving them the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction.

Religious Education in Scotland has changed dramatically since 1872, particularly towards the latter part of the 20th century. Perhaps the pivotal document in the development of RE is Malcolm Millar's report on religious and moral education (Scottish Education Department [SED] 1972). Millar's report arose out of a crisis in the RE classroom. The confessional religious instruction approach delivered previously by well-meaning non-specialists was, according to the report, failing to meet the needs of an increasingly secular, globally aware and multi-cultural pupil population. As a result of the recommendations outlined by Millar's committee RE became a non-confessional 'personal quest' (SED 1972:89), allowing pupils to explore their own responses to the need for meaning, value and purpose. The subject was to be taught by specialist teachers. In time certification and Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) government inspections would aim to add further credibility to RE. The latest changes in the subject include an increasingly philosophical approach, and content within the subject now refers explicitly to philosophical positions and traditions.

In other articles (Nixon 2008, 2009) the researcher has documented the emergence of philosophy within RE both as content and method in the period after 1972. This has been particularly the case since the review of senior school education in Scotland in 1999 which introduced the title Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies for National Qualifications in RE for senior pupils.

Philosophy has manifested not only in terms of reference to the key philosophical debates and positions (Fisher's 'philosophical canon' [Fisher 2009]), but also in terms of an increasingly philosophical pedagogical approach. With regard to the first development explicitly philosophical content has become increasingly prevalent since the *Millar Report*, particularly as the subject gained national certification status (since 1983). These certificate courses were adopted not only as electives for pupils in secondary schools, but increasingly also within mandatory core RE. As a result, typically from the third year of secondary school onwards, pupils are studying philosophical stances that inform morality (such as utilitarianism, egoism and Kant); philosophy of religion (the existence of God and theodicy); philosophy of science (the nature of religion and science and the apparent conflict between these areas), and metaphysics (free will and determinism). Furthermore, the first national curricular guidelines for RE (Scottish Office Education Department [SOED] 1992) also sanctioned the study of non-religious views, many of which can be described as philosophical (such as Humanism).

With regard to philosophical pedagogy, RE has since Millar's report increasingly adopted a non-confessional approach in which pupils engage in discussion and debate on religious and philosophical matters. In many ways Scottish RE has followed the fourfold development of Hull (1992) in which RE moves from confessional, to multi-religious, to child-centred, and to a dialogic approach. In Scotland such an approach would be described as the 'personal search' (Kincaid & McVeigh 2001). Pupils would develop their own metaphysics vis-à-vis representation of a range of worldviews in the RE classroom. This would be accomplished by using a range of critical thinking skills, discussion and debate. Such skills have been manifest in RE policy documents since 1972. Perhaps the best example is from the curricular guidance included in the Scottish Central Committee on Religious Education's *Bulletin 2* (SED 1981).

According to *Bulletin 2* the aim of RE is 'to enable pupils to develop a consistent set of beliefs' and 'to test them in the light of reason and experience and the evidence of the great traditions' (SED 1981:3). In *Bulletin 2* certain skills and strategies for RE are proposed. These would go beyond simple knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils should be able to 'evaluate' a belief or belief system in terms of its 'internal coherence', 'adequacy as an exploratory system', 'self consistency', 'consistency with other knowledge, beliefs and convictions' and 'ability to meet objections' (SED 1981:12).

In Scottish education the *Munn Report* (SED 1977) is a key document in establishing the educational credentials of RE

as a separate mode of learning within the curriculum. The *Munn Report* also posited that the curricular changes reflect the demands of society, the psychological needs of learners, and the epistemological claims of the various fields of knowledge (subjects).

The hypotheses

It is the researcher's intention to test the claims of the *Munn Report* (SED 1977) against empirical evidence. Therefore, the hypotheses that emerge are that RE has become more philosophical as a result of changes in society, changes in education in response to developing knowledge of what it is to be a child in that social situation, and traditions of meaning-making that continue to influence the way in which the curriculum develops. To a certain extent, all three of the areas considered in these hypotheses (secularisation, education and epistemology) are subsets of social change in that they represent the manifestation of social change. However, the relationships between these three areas are extremely complex, and attributing explanatory weight to them is an equally complex matter. This is evident, for example, in the *Millar Report* where secularisation and multiculturalism are posited as causally significant alongside the views of Piaget and Goldman on the need for a child-centred approach. Nevertheless, despite such complexity, the researcher feels that these are heuristic categories that allow for discussion of changes within RE which cannot be discussed in an undifferentiated way.

This article seeks to test three hypotheses

RE has become more philosophical in the face of postmodernism and secularisation

Can changes within RE be the result of what some social theorists such as Usher and Edwards (1994) describe as the 'post-modern moment' which is characterised by epistemological, metaphysical and ethical confusion; interpenetration of ideas; multiculturalism; relativism; and a crisis of legitimation where the truth or falsity of ideas, beliefs and theories is difficult (if not impossible) to establish? Can this be seen in the emergence of philosophy within RE; a discipline which seeks to deal with these very issues? Can we evidence Lyotard's 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (2004) within the emergence of philosophy and criticality towards religions and worldviews in RE?

Secularisation is obviously an aspect of social change and may be a corollary of the post-modern moment. This research will investigate a possible link between the decline of institutional religion in Scotland (Bruce 2002; Nixon 2009) and changes in secondary RE. Has religion increasingly become marginalised by the mainstreaming of a 'philosophical' consideration of questions of belief and morality? Has RE, in the face of a social climate which has apparently become increasingly hostile to religious approaches to life, sought to become credible to its stakeholders (pupils, parents and teachers) by adopting a philosophical methodology?

Changes to RE have occurred as a result of changing approaches to education

The hypothesis here is that changes to RE, including the emergence of philosophy, make sense within a wider educational context which has principally involved a more child-centred, thinking skills approach, and what has been identified as a 'reflective' approach to learning in all areas of the curriculum (Lipman 1991). In other words, has philosophy emerged as part of the recognition that pupils should be encouraged to explore their own experiences and develop their own beliefs as a result of education rather than these beliefs being 'banked' (Freire 1996) in an authoritarian and heteronomous fashion? Has philosophy emerged as a 'thinking skills' approach in the context of the democratisation of the educational process?

A further question relating to educational change is about developments in the subject RE as it has become more philosophical. Could there be a correlation between the emergence of philosophical approaches and the 'educationalisation' (Hannah 2007) of RE? In other words, could it be that the demands of assessment privilege a certain type of knowledge construction in terms of rational analysis of concepts (philosophical skills), as opposed to a phenomenological approach to RE in which the central aim is the ethnographic immersion in the world of the believer? That is, has philosophy emerged because of the enthusiasm of the RE teaching class to drive towards certification? This, of course begs the further question as to why they were so enthusiastic to do so in the first place, which may return us to the consideration of the social and educational milieu in which such decisions were made.

The emergence of philosophy in RE makes sense in terms of an educational tradition in which philosophy and religion are cognate areas

In section 1 of this article it is suggested that democratic approaches may increasingly be part of a particularly Scottish tradition (or educational mythos) that valued philosophy and the 'democratic intellect' (Davie 1961). Could it be that the (re)emergence of philosophy in Scottish schools represents an educational tradition which valued philosophy?

Could it also be that the emergence of philosophy is related to the view of Fitzgerald (2007) that discourse about religion since the Enlightenment has been in philosophical terms and that 'religion', as it has been understood, is a philosophical construct? The question that emerges here is: what has been the relationship between religion and philosophy in the West? Have they been cognate areas of study and what is the nature of this relationship in light of the empirical evidence discussed in this article?

The threefold hypothesis that emerges is that philosophy has emerged as a rational navigational tool for the post-modern moment; as a method for the emerging reflective educational paradigm (Lipman 1991), and as part of an ongoing epistemological tradition in which philosophy and religion can be regarded as cognate areas of knowledge construction.

Methodological considerations

The empirical research gathered to test the hypotheses was generated by two waves of interviews (seventeen in all) with key informants in Scottish education and sector leading practitioners from the RE profession, and a national survey of Scottish secondary school RE departments. Key attributes of interviewees were their role and expertise in the development of RE. For example, lecturers from all initial teacher education institutes (subsequently referred to as ITEs) who train secondary school RE teachers were included. Also included were RE teachers who have led and authored changes in the RE curriculum, all of whom happen to be Principal Teachers; departmental heads of RE within secondary schools (subsequently referred to as PTs). Other interviewees included professors of History, Sociology and Philosophy who have either published on social change and education, or been involved in teaching philosophy in schools. The final interviewee was a representative of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) with the remit for the inspection of RE.

In both waves of interviews the researcher adopted a semi-structured approach, though the interview schedule developed as the research progressed. In the first wave of interviews, which took place near the beginning of the research (May 2006 – August 2008), predominantly with PTs (six of the nine were based in schools), the researcher was keen to get a sense of the extent to which philosophy has emerged in RE, as well as ask questions about the content of philosophy and its reception within schools by pupils, parents and fellow teachers. The second wave of interviews (August – September 2009) reflected the developing understanding of the researcher and the emerging hypotheses for the emergence of philosophy. In these interviews the researcher summarised the research to date and asked for the interviewees' perspectives on these hypotheses. He also invited interviewees to voice alternative explanations for the emergence of philosophy.

The results of the pilot survey were discussed in a previous article (Nixon 2009). The current article does not intend to present and analyse the national survey in its entirety. Instead, this article will focus on the response of schools to the question about the reasons for the emergence of philosophy within RE.

Though the researcher was denied access (chiefly to protect the workload of teaching staff) to 64 schools, the 126 returns (from a possible 388) reflect a wide range of types, locations and sizes of schools and incorporate urban, inner city, junior secondary and rural environs, as well as denominational and non-denominational establishments. The researcher felt that an overall return rate of 33% in a national survey of this kind would provide an adequate sample.

Presentation of data and discussion

This section aims to summarise the data from the three sources of evidence, setting this alongside relevant literature. Throughout this section the author attempts to relate the responses to the hypotheses, either in terms of congruence or contradiction. The following section (conclusions) attempts to create a theoretical narrative for the emergence of philosophy within Scottish RE.

Reasons given in the national survey for the emergence of philosophy

Figure 1 offers a summary of responses in the national survey to the question about reasons why philosophy has emerged within RE. From the 126 schools surveyed, 194 responses were submitted. Many respondent schools offered multiple reasons for this development.

The most frequently reported response (66) was one in which it was suggested that philosophy and religion are cognate areas that have a shared purpose and heritage. A sample of these views:

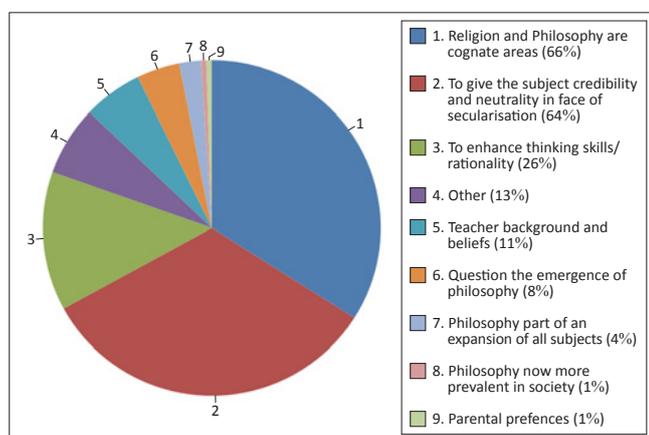
'Historically religion and Philosophy are interlaced.' (Secondary school 74)

'Religion and Philosophy are linked. Religion, particularly in Scotland, was where education began. It is a natural progression that Philosophy should be part of RME but I do not feel that it should be distinct as is happening in some schools. I feel that it limits religious studies rather than broadening it'. (Secondary school 79)

The second largest group of responses (64) were those that suggested that philosophy has emerged in order to lend RE credibility and neutrality; and to escape from negative connotations of indoctrination, particularly in the light of religious decline and an increasingly secular teaching workforce and pupil client group:

'The secularisation of society means that people look for understanding and guidance less from religion and believe that philosophy can provide it. This is then reflected in our education system.' (Secondary school 7).

'More people in society are shifting away from traditional religious stances, so the subject has to move with the times, and look at alternative views of the world.' (Secondary school 113)



N = 194

FIGURE 1: 6 Reasons for the emergence of philosophy.

The next largest group of respondents (26) considered the emergence of philosophy as a means to enhance thinking skills; and to offer pupils tools for rational autonomy. In many cases this was linked to current educational policy, particularly the Curriculum for Excellence, which was perceived to place emphasis on the thinking skills that philosophy is imagined to develop:

'I see it as central to the development of reasoned decision making in all aspects of the students' lives. It also provides them with the critical thinking skills they need in the media led society in which we live.' (Secondary school 6)

'Philosophy promotes thinking skills and it is therefore wise for subject areas to take the philosophical approach on board since improved thinking skills mean improved learning, the goal of every teacher.' (Secondary school 111)

Beyond these three main responses (which constitute 75% of those given) other responses included those (11) who argue that philosophy has emerged as a result of the academic background and beliefs of teachers:

'A lot of RMPS teachers have got the qualifications that the SQA want to teach Philosophy.' (Secondary school 35)

There were also those who voiced opposition and caution regarding the emergence of philosophy and questioned this development (8 responses):

'1. RME practitioners were desperate not to lose this area to another subject, thus lessening their clout. 2. Because philosophers within RME (as it was) appear to me to have an agenda to ease out the phenomenological in favour of the logical. 3. Because philosophers (at least some of them) appear to me to think that most pupils can find peace and happiness through becoming more rational and logical beings.' (Secondary school 18).

Other responses within the survey were that philosophy has emerged as a result of parental preference (1); as a result of the prevalence of philosophy in society (1), and as part of a process whereby philosophy is becoming recognised in all subject areas (4). Thirteen responses could not be categorised easily. These included the view that the emergence of philosophy is the result of 'American influence' (Secondary school 48).

Postmodernity, secularisation and the emergence of philosophy

Twenty-eight percent of responses in the national survey indicated that philosophy has become an increasing part of RE provision in Scottish schools as a result of social change. All seventeen key informant interviews also acknowledge that RE has changed, becoming more philosophical, to reflect a more diverse, pluralistic and less religious social climate.

Paterson (2000) and Gellner (1983) articulate the view that education serves as a carrier of culture. With this in mind one can put current developments into the larger context of the creation of state schooling from 1872 to the present day, whereby the process of the loss of ecclesiastical governance and influence on education was accelerated, principally in the last forty years, due to changes in Scottish society. This view is described by academics such as Brown (2001), Bruce (2002), Davie (1994, 2000), Avis (2003), Paterson *et al.* (2004), and in the policy history of RE as has been documented in

RE policy documents such as the *Millar Report* (SED 1972), *Bulletin 1* (SED 1978) *Bulletin 2* (SED 1981) and *5–14 Guidelines* (SOED 1992), and by Kincaid and McVeigh (2001).

Paterson (2003), Bruce (2002) and Beck (1992) argue that Scottish society has moved towards an increasingly individualistic emphasis where education is less concerned with transmitting traditional or cultural narratives, and more with the development of critically analytical individuals. The emergence of a philosophical approach to RE can perhaps be placed within this development.

Literature considering the development of the pedagogies of RE (Jackson 2004; Erricker 2001; Hull 1992; Cox 1983; Elliott 1982; Grimmitt 2000) posits that social change, principally in the forms of pluralism, secularisation and epistemological uncertainty lies behind the development of the various pedagogies of RE in the period from the 1960s onwards. Hull (1992) proposes that RE moves from a mono-religious to a multi-religious and finally to a dialectical emphasis and perhaps this provides a continuum for the evolution of RE in the light of social change, with increasingly philosophical RE representing a move towards a dialectical and controversial approach to subject matter that had previously been presented as authoritative and uncontroversial.

According to a number of questionnaire respondents (28%), interviewees (all 17) and Huggler (2009), RE begins to adopt the language of philosophy rather than theology as soon as it responds to such social change; again, this is present both in the national survey data where teachers have argued that philosophy is desirable to fulfil the evaluative requirements of multifaith RE, and documentary evidence where the key documents such as *Bulletin 2* (SED 1981) and *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2009b) discuss the need for the development of skills such as discernment in examining ideas for internal consistency and rigour. That is, where religions and worldviews are placed equally and neutrally alongside each other before children who are beginning to develop a sense of their own views about life (in some cases at odds with familial commitments), there is a need to offer the children skills in logic, consideration of evidence and reasoning.

The 'Personal Search' (Scottish Office Education Department [SOED] 1992) approach to teaching RE that has developed in Scotland alongside the humanistic and interpretative responses elsewhere in the UK (Grimmitt 2000) can be viewed as an attempt to lend RE legitimacy in a pluralistic and increasingly secular society.

What has emerged from this research is that RE in non-denominational schools has not only become less theological and more philosophical as a response to the loss of church control, but has done so, in large part, in order to retain credibility in the eyes of a less religious parent and teacher clientele, or at least a clientele who are opposed to the privileging of any one religion's claims over any other existential claims. In the 21st century John Knox's urgent claim in 1560 that children should be able to read for the sake of their souls survives only in the occasional school assembly where the Gideons' society are allowed to distribute their

New Testaments and Psalms. Interestingly, such events are now under scrutiny given the review of religious observance (Scottish Executive 2005), which recognises the inappropriateness of confessional events in assemblies where large numbers of children come from non-religious or non-Christian backgrounds.

A further area of development explored in the survey data and referred to by the interviewees is the increasing emphasis placed on morality in Scottish secondary school RE, particularly the exploration of non-religious stances. This is particularly the case in the third and fourth years where the national survey revealed that 52% of units in surveyed schools considered ethical issues and moral philosophy in areas such as medical ethics, capital punishment, gender and human rights.

Three of the interviewees (the professors of sociology, history and education) argued that the process of the loss of influence of the churches, which may previously have served as arbiters and guarantors of moral judgement, is particularly evident in the prevalence of moral debates in our culture, particularly relating to the right to control the human body. This can be seen in the ubiquitous discussions about the right to die and about homosexuality, though these issues can be extrapolated to other issues about the loss of church hegemony in areas of ethical debate such as the decay of sabbatarianism in the western isles or the ordination of women and homosexual persons.

The data therefore indicate that the prevalence of moral issues such as those mentioned above in RE in the secondary school is a result of social change which has seen the decline of ecclesiastical influence and the creation of a dialogic space in RE in which those issues can be discussed. Such issues are rendered controversial both by lack of deference to an authoritative source (the church) as a result of secularisation, and by a heightened rational autonomy in the pupils; the development of which is central to current educational philosophy (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2009a).

Such views are also expressed in responses to the national survey where a number of respondents, in answer to questions about pupils' response to the introduction of philosophy, describe the enthusiasm pupils exhibit when given the dialogic and thinking space with which they perceive philosophy to present them. In many of the responses who represent such a view (70% of responses) a view is articulated that philosophy has more kudos and credibility as it is open-ended and discursive.

The issue of credibility for RE, something that emerged repeatedly in the survey data (in the reasons cited for the emergence of philosophy), can perhaps also explain why the subject has increasingly focused on such controversial issues. In other words, teachers of RE have presented a curriculum that appeals to a pupil population which places emphasis on issues which shock and compel pupils in terms of content, but also defy their expectations of RE in terms of presenting an ambiguous and nuanced account of these issues. In the words of ITEL4, RE is a subject 'that is always

seeking to escape from itself'. Those survey respondents and interviewees who argued that developments such as the emergence of philosophy are attempts to lend credibility to what has been perceived as a peripheral, statutory appendix to the curriculum lend further weight to such a view. What they do not discuss is the underlying reasons why the subject is perceived thus and this article tentatively suggests that secularisation and plurality may be a part of this process.

However, perhaps too much weight can be placed on the secularisation of society when it comes to the prevalence of ethical discourse in RE. Other factors, such as the development of new technologies and scientific awareness of, for example, the gestation of the foetus or genetics, may also have driven the desire to visit issues newly rendered controversial by such developments. Nevertheless, in part, this explanation only defers the debate about the loss of ecclesiastical influence in that, for many people, the latest technological developments highlight the lack of relevance of responses based on ancient revelation and lends impetus to the attempt to find judgement elsewhere than in religion. A similar point is perhaps made in revisiting the professor of education's personal recollections about how new technology led to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. This created in him a resolution that education should involve philosophical discourse. Elsewhere in his interview he describes the incongruity of teaching about Abrahamic obedience to a conscript audience in the classroom. Thus new technology has made the need for ethical discourse acute, but to frame such discourse in purely religious terms to an increasingly diverse and secular culture is, in his view, not only incongruous but counter-productive to the aim of steering the human enterprise through the technological challenges of modernity.

The emphasis on values and morality is also evident in wider developments in Scottish education. The latest review, the *Curriculum for Excellence*, places the development of pro-social values at the heart of the curriculum. One could speculate that the foregrounding of values is an attempt (albeit unconsciously) to address the complex nature of modern Scottish society where schools (rather than congregations) are expected to inculcate communitarian values, but are expected to do so while simultaneously teaching the skills of good thinking and discernment rather than deference and obedience to monolithic cultural traditions. In other words, in the 'existential vacuum' (Frankl 2004) or in a time characterised by a loss of consensus (Holloway 1999) education is taking up roles previously held by institutional religion when it comes to the exploration and inculcation of values.

Scottish education developed, as Davie (1994) suggested, as a carrier of culture, social aspirations and national self-image. However, this research has demonstrated that there have been significant changes in all three of these areas, principally with regards to how education reflects the loss of religious commitment and influence.

Furthermore, although Davie (2000) argues that certain religious beliefs have persistence as evidenced by social attitude surveys, she concedes that these tend to be an unconscious package of assumptions about reality rather than a worked out theology. Other thinkers who have questioned the secularisation thesis, such as Gill (1989), Martin (2003) and Cox (1982), also argue against the attempt to measure the decline of religion in quantitative terms, arguing for a privatised, more individualistic spirituality. Such views may indeed offer an alternative to the views of Bruce (2002) and Brown (2001), who forecast a terminal decline in religiosity in developed countries. However, in the context of this article they do not explore the means by which people are to articulate their increasingly privatised spirituality, or outline methods that can be used to enter matters of metaphysics or morality into the public discourse of a society where the traditional theological language for doing so has little currency. Philosophy offers the evaluative and navigational toolkit, and an inclusive language for people (children) in an increasingly secular (or at least complex) Scotland, to articulate these unconscious beliefs in a context which is not denominational or committed. It therefore renders the enterprise of articulating their metaphysics a legitimacy it would not have had if it had been couched in a theological discourse.

Davie (2002:n.p.) also argues that European civilisation has been shaped by three great traditions:

1. Judeo-Christian monotheism
2. Greek rationalism
3. Roman organisation.

Interestingly, she posits no weighting to each of these three influences. This article posits that the currency of philosophy may be part of a resurgent tradition of 'Greek rationalism', expanding in influence and visibility to fill the gap left by the declining influence of 'Judeo-Christian monotheism'.

Educational change and the emergence of philosophy

The second hypothetical strand, which obviously relates to social change, is the emergence of philosophy as part of an educational paradigm shift (Lipman 1991; Bolton 2010; Bottery 1998; De Bono 1995) in which philosophy is attuned to a constructivist and reflective classroom, which becomes a child-centred communicative space in which pupils are invited to freely construct meaning and where the teacher is facilitator rather than authoritative expert (Freire 1996) and where the educational exercise is prospective (seeking to produce new knowledge) rather than retrospective (merely rehearsing the knowledge of the past) (Kozulin 1998).

In the national survey 13% of the respondents indicated that philosophy has emerged as part of RE for these reasons and five of the interviewees discussed this possibility. Philosophy is viewed as providing a tested tradition for rational discourse and a lexicon for thinking that is increasingly recognised in schools. In an educational climate where metacognitive skills

are given a central place it is easy to see why an increasingly philosophical approach (not only to RE) has currency.

Indeed, six of the interviewees made this latter point that philosophy should permeate all subjects, thereby endowing them with a greater reflexivity and sense of context. In a sense this can be seen as part of the Scottish mythos of democratic access to education discussed previously and put forward by Davie (1961), Osborne (1968) and Paterson (2000, 2008a). According to this view, the emergence of philosophy can be viewed as part of a continuing development towards a democratic education. In a sense the mythologies of Scottish education – democratic access to learning and the place of the liberal arts – are continuing to influence educational policy.

Three interviewees (PT5, ITEL4 and ITEL5) argue that the emergence of philosophy may be part of a rejection of the weaknesses of a phenomenological approach to RE. In their views the phenomenological approach, whereby pupils acquire a number of facts about the religions and beliefs studied in RE, lacks existential engagement with pupils and is conducive to an undesirable and counterproductive rote learning of the phenomena of religion. A philosophical approach, in their view, invites pupils to engage personally and critically with the universal and perennial questions that, for them, underlie religion and philosophy.

While the philosophical approach in RE is a step forward for PT5 and ITEL5, it becomes part of a general trend in education which commodifies knowledge for ITEL4. In the case of religion, this leads to an over-emphasis on belief and a rational examination of belief as the essential characteristic of religion. For ITEL4, as in Fitzgerald (2007), this is to downplay the other aspects of religion such as belonging, identity, ritual, story, festival, practice and religious experience, which become neglected when RE moves towards a philosophical paradigm. In the national survey this can certainly be witnessed as pupils progress in secondary school. Responses to the first question about provision of RE suggest that there is a move away from non-certificated units focused on religion and related phenomena such as festivals, artefacts and stories in the first years of secondary school, towards a presentation of religion entirely in terms of belief in the certificated units offered for the majority of pupils in later years. This seems to bear out ITEL4's suggestion that in RE certification or measurement and philosophical content go hand in hand.

It may justifiably be argued, therefore, that the extent of the influence of secularism and pluralism may have to be tempered according to the consideration that the philosophification of RE may be the result of schools being required to produce a particular type of knowledge which can present a distorted picture of what it is to be religious.

That this has happened and been allowed to happen, however, may be the result of the fact that we have moved to a social landscape where there is not only hostility to religion, but where the language of festival, story, ritual and practice

has little resonance with a largely secular youth populace, and is therefore increasingly abandoned in favour of a belief-centred philosophical approach to worldviews, particularly in the later years of secondary school. Statistics about levels of attendance and commitment to religious practice (Bruce 2002) give weight to such a view.

Religion and philosophy are cognate areas

The largest number of respondents in the national survey to the question about the reasons for the emergence of philosophy in RE (34%) offered the view that religion and philosophy are cognate; that RE is the natural place for philosophy as it is a subject, like philosophy, that centres on the great questions about the meaning of life and ideas of value. These responses indicated that philosophy offers the means by which pupils can engage critically with religious and moral issues. There is also the claim that the two areas have a shared history, one school describing philosophy as theology's handmaiden (School 120).

Eight of the interviewees offered similar views, arguing that the philosophical skills of reasoning and analysis are part of the personal search approach to RE which begins with the experience of the child and then moves to comparison with the beliefs, values or practices of others in a range of traditions. ITEL4 is of the opinion that the philosophical 'tendencies' that were already present in RE have become more explicit.

ITEL4 put forward a broad context in which to understand developments in RE, suggesting that RE, as part of a Cartesian educational tradition which valued rationality and 'a particular form of phenomenology' was always intrinsically philosophical. ITEL4 posits that RE is part of a move towards a certain kind of educational product where, driven by the external demands of assessment and the internal demands of a Cartesian paradigm, knowledge is commodified and where 'they [schools] privilege a particular kind of disembodied cognitive performance in all subjects as they move towards Highers and certification'. For ITEL4, therefore, the educational change within RE is one where there has been a move away from a phenomenological study of religion from the view of an empathetic imagined insider (Smart 1968), to one where views about religion and beliefs are required to be articulated and objectified to meet the demands of assessment. For ITEL4 this is a big part of the RE story, particularly as the RE profession sought credibility and ranking alongside other subjects through the path of increased certification, thereby making religion something educationally measurable.

PT6 argues that links with philosophy are explored as theology becomes more liberal, and that philosophy offers a toolkit with which to explore and analyse multiple interpretations. PT6 offers the view that Christianity has a liberal critical tradition which naturally leads to the use of philosophical methodology; something he feels may not be so prevalent in other religions. This is something referred to in the *Millar*

Report which posits four matters that precipitated the need to change RE, namely secularisation, multi-culturalism and new educational models, as well as the influence of 20th century Biblical liberal theology and scholarship.

PT6 may be correct in his view that the 'philosophication' of RE in Scotland may partly be due to the liberal theological climate in Scotland; this is something the author also suspects. Further research about the degree backgrounds and beliefs of RE teachers may indeed reveal a tendency to liberal theology. Perhaps, however, there is a connection between liberal theology and increasing secularism, especially where the national church (the Church of Scotland) is perceived as liberal. For Berger (1999) religion declines where it conforms to the modernist paradigm and this may relate to the views of Davie (2005) and Dennett (2007) that in Scotland the lack of a competitive theological market place has contributed to a move to secularism.

Other reasons for the emergence of philosophy

In this section, the researcher considers the other reasons given for the emergence of philosophy. Beyond the threefold hypothesis that RE has changed in the light of social and educational change and reflects the (re)emergence of a relationship between RE and philosophy, other possible explanations emerged in the course of the data collection. These were not directly anticipated by the researcher and a number of questions can be raised about their validity. However, they indicate interesting areas for follow-up research.

Philosophy has emerged as the result of the influence of RE teachers

The view that philosophy has emerged as the result of the influence of certain groups of RE teachers or individuals was put forward by 6% of the respondents in the national survey of RE staff and discussed by four of the interviewees. The survey respondents who posited this described how the inclusion of philosophy accelerated when national qualifications in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) were created (1999), thereby allowing graduates from degree backgrounds reflecting philosophy as well as, in some cases, those without degree credits in theology or religious studies a place in RE teacher training courses (Schools 35 and 50).

This view was also posited, in more elaborate form, by ITEL1 and ITEL2, who argued that the low tariff for entry to teacher training in RE has allowed graduates to enter the profession who may lack specialist knowledge but have a broad arts degree which includes qualifications in philosophy. ITEL1 argues, therefore, that we have a situation where philosophy and philosophical approaches appeal to a number of people within the RE profession but not to others. As a result a range of positions – favourable, neutral and antipathetic to the increasing emergence of philosophy in RE – have emerged.

Indeed it does appear that from this spectrum of views certain individuals have had a great deal of influence on how

RE policy has developed and that, in recent years, those of a philosophical disposition have had the greater influence in policy formation. Consider the response of PT6 discussing his role in the development of explicitly philosophical units within the Higher Still RMPS framework:

There wasn't movement towards purely philosophical stuff so I really had to fight my cause, as it were, because I had been reading a lot about religious language following on from Wittgenstein, Cupitt ... I had to do a fair bit of persuasion to justify that if we are doing something on religious language and tying it into Philosophy and Religion then we needed a completely new unit to be able to achieve this.

Perhaps, therefore, certain individuals did have a great influence in the increasingly philosophical nature of RE. However, before continuing it is worth stating that the views of PT6 were accepted by the Higher Still Development Unit (a group of seconded RE specialists) and he was not therefore exercising an individual fiat based solely on his private reading but formed part of a process during which these secondees reached a consensus. Furthermore, PT6 stated during the interview that what he was arguing for in these discussions was a recognition in official policy of what had been the case, albeit implicitly, in RE for a number of years.

According to PT6, the content within the Higher had already become philosophical and this is indeed evident in the RE policy literature (Nixon 2008). PT6 was arguing to establish recognition of existing philosophical content rather than trying to establish it on the basis of his own philosophical position.

The influence of certain individuals within RE was also discussed during the interview with the Inspector (HMIE) who posited that certain individuals who have been involved in the development of qualifications in RE (usually seconded teachers) have been influential. The HMIE argues that these people, which are becoming a larger group, not only influence the character of certificate RE, but are also influential in their local authorities, guiding practice and playing a prominent role in RE support networks. The caveat the HMIE places on this is that RE policy is therefore predominantly driven by developments in certificate courses. For the HMIE, the need to gain credibility for the subject through certification has led to a neglect of core, uncertificated RE courses and developments have tended to be very much top-down, a situation where developments in the senior school drives developments in earlier years.

The views that philosophy has emerged partly because of the low requirements for entry to the RE profession, and because RE teachers have had more license to represent their philosophical views in their curricula, or allow certification to drive curricular developments in a quest for credibility do not counter but may complement the hypothesis that RE has changed to reflect a more secular society. Indeed, it can be argued that the profession is attracting graduates from an increasingly broad constituency, reflective of wider social

change. The professor of sociology makes a similar point when he argues that changes in RE have been precipitated by the secularisation of the middle classes; traditionally the recruiting ground for teaching.

Nevertheless, it may be the case that certain individuals at initial teacher education institutions may have a say in whether these secularised applicants enter the RE profession. In other words, the disposition of certain ITEL staff towards a philosophical approach to RE may be influential, given that they are effectively gatekeepers to the profession. This is something ITEL1 raises when he says 'that there is at least one institution that will take graduates (for RE teacher training) with only philosophy.' That there are different forms of emphasis at the universities offering training in RE is partly discernable in the national survey where schools in satellite local authorities to the universities tend to reflect the philosophy of RE advocated in the university. Thus, many Edinburgh, Lothian and Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire schools reflect favourably on the emergence of philosophy in the titles given to the subject and in a number of their quantitative responses to question 1 of the national survey, thereby reflecting the pro-philosophy stance of their local universities. Conversely, in Glasgow and neighbouring authorities there tends to be a more traditional view of RE (as opposed to RMPS), again perhaps reflecting the view of the academics at Glasgow and Strathclyde universities. The author is aware that these patterns can only be tentatively discerned and that there are counterexamples to both situations provided here.

The broadening of RE to include the study of world religions has influenced the increasing emphasis on philosophy and philosophical skills in RE

The view that RE has become more philosophical as the subject broadened to include the study of world religions other than Christianity was discussed by seven of the interviewees. In this view the move between the stages in the development of RE described by Hull (1992) from mono-religious to multi-religious to dialectical gathers momentum as pupils encounter a diversity of traditions. A diverse presentation of apparently competing claims creates a problem for the pupil, and this problem is one that requires an element of philosophical analysis when opting for an inclusive, exclusive, plural or sceptical perspective on the truth or otherwise of the claims of these traditions (Huggler 2009).

For ITEL1 the study of other religions makes it possible to discuss the underlying framework of religion and again, philosophy provided the lexicon with which to do so. ITEL4 argues similarly that since RE has become multi-religious and religions have been presented neutrally, there has been a move towards the consideration of beliefs rather than practices, and towards rational analysis and away from affective immersion.

Seven interviewees cited the study of eastern religion, particularly Buddhism, as influencing the subsequent emergence of philosophy. Interviewees offered the view

that Buddhism appeals to an increasingly secular pupil populace in that it appears to offer a non-theistic philosophy of life centred on the consideration of individual internal experience rather than external edict. Thus the traditional view of religion is challenged in the eyes of pupils as they realise that one can have a philosophy of life and a morality that is not founded on authoritarian or supernatural grounds. PT6 describes how this must appear to the pupils in comparison to Semitic religion. For ITEL1 the study of eastern religions invites philosophical discussion as he feels that these religions invite a consideration of how 'philosophical systems are constructed'.

The palatability of Buddhism to Scottish children was also discussed in terms of how it mirrors the philosophical dispositions of many today (Professor of Sociology, HMIE, PT6, ITEL4). This is also perhaps borne out by SQA statistics, according to which Buddhism is the most studied religion in Higher RMPS (with over 50% of candidates), although one must state that this may mirror the preferences of teachers rather than pupils.

Nevertheless, those interviewees who offered this view argued that the prevalence of the study of Buddhism, whilst appealing to the desire for some kind of cosmic justice (Professor of Sociology), and offering a philosophy of life consonant with an individualistic society, represents a projected and in some ways distorted view of Buddhism. That is, it largely ignores the fact that, in many forms, Buddhism is as supernaturalistic and authoritarian as other spiritual traditions. Many people choose to forget this, for example, in the tendency to hagiographic description of the Dalai Lama (often by people who would otherwise be secular).

Conversely, the author would add that this also fails to acknowledge that there are non-supernatural and individualistic traditions in other religions, such as can be found in Christian existentialism or Sufism within Islam, that are seemingly ignored by such an analysis. Perhaps, therefore, the appeal of eastern traditions does not lie in the prevalence of these aspects per se within them, but in their perceived appeal as different and exotic to pupils, with less cultural presuppositions and baggage than Christianity.

PT6 presents the view that the teaching of Buddhism may have had the effect of demonstrating the possibility of non-theistic morality. In doing so he felt this offered a challenge to what has been one of the assumptions of Western society, though the question whether a theistic worldview has dominated European ethics is itself a contentious matter (Grayling 2003; Jackson 2004). It may be claiming too much for this view to suggest that the study of world religions opened up new possibilities for the formation of ethical and metaphysical decision-making. However, a look at the development of RE policy does show the inclusion of material exploring the basis of morality in terms of autonomy and heteronomy (Higher RMPS 2005 – present).

Views cautious about the emergence of philosophy in RE

Four percent of the respondents in the national survey of RE departments expressed opposition or caution about the emergence of philosophy. Six interviewees made similar comments. They were concerned about the loss of the affective and spiritual in favour of the rational and analytical should philosophy be allowed to dominate RE, and they were concerned about the ability of the RE profession to deliver philosophy effectively, given their degree backgrounds. Replacing RE with philosophy, for ITEL3, would remove the capability for RE to facilitate the holistic development of children, depriving them of the wisdom of one of humanity's great traditions (religion) and offering an abstract, analytic subject that does not take into account where the child is, in terms of their own development and in terms of where they fit into their community.

The view that philosophy represents a threat to affective and empathetic RE may, however, depend on a particular view of philosophy. Interestingly, ITEL3 has a degree background in philosophy and is well versed in the qualities and limitations of a focus on the western analytical tradition (something he discussed in his interview).

Philosophy, it seems, is often conflated with philosophers or the philosophical 'canon' (Fisher 2009). Those who do so become concerned that RE will come to lack existential relevance for pupils. Arguably, this view may be behind the fear that some of the respondents voiced with regard to the emergence of philosophy. That they may think this may be, in part, due to a limited view of what philosophy is, judging it an academic exercise in isolation from how pupils may actually see themselves and live their lives. There are a host of philosophies, eastern, western, ancient, modern, religious and humanistic, that can be discussed with pupils and that can have a direct bearing on ideas of self, community and moral action. This can range from a consideration of Sartrean existentialism; to an application of the free will debate to how we view human agency and ideas of responsibility, and also include a positive consideration of what organised atheistic philosophies (for example, Humanism) has to offer as a set of precepts for life (positive in the sense that humanism is neutrally presented, but also in that these views are not simply viewed as negative alternatives to religious belief). Arguably, these are very much part of the 'belief supermarket' children currently inhabit and it becomes disingenuous if the RE curriculum only presents religious philosophies to children, either in terms of its content, and more trivially (perhaps) in term of its name.

Other views (ITEL1) voiced a concern that the emergence of philosophy is seen as some kind of evolutionary development for RE and, as such, becomes part of a secularist drive to remove religion from education. Copley (2005) and Thompson (2004) voice similar concerns about secular indoctrination in schools. The 'philosophical evangelicals' ITEL1 refers to, may, indeed, have been influential in the emergence of philosophy in the subject, though the data

presented in this article suggest that their motivation has more to do with providing credibility to RE than with the abolition of religious content from the subject altogether.

Nevertheless, the data do provide some indication that this discussion may have, to an extent, become polarised between those for and against philosophy. The author is aware that, in conducting this research, some respondents and interviewees may have been inclined to view the discussion as being about whether either philosophy or religion should be the dominant element of RE.

Conclusion

The research question posited in this article was: 'What factors have led to the emergence of philosophy within Religious Education in Scottish secondary schools?' The review of literature posed three hypothetical strands with regard to this question:

1. RE has become more philosophical in the face of post-modernity and secularisation.
2. Changes to RE have occurred as a result of changing approaches to education.
3. The emergence of philosophy in RE make sense in terms of an educational tradition in which philosophy and religion are cognate areas.

In this concluding section it is hoped to assess to what extent the empirical work undertaken answers these questions or prove the hypotheses false. When considering each of the three strands in the sections above, the author indicated that these areas are intimately related and that they all play a role in the emergence of philosophy in RE.

This article concludes that philosophical skills and philosophical content have become an increasingly large part of RE provision in secondary schools in Scotland since 1972 (the *Millar Report*) and that this process is one that has been stimulated by social change, that is, a move towards secularisation. The move to philosophy has also been in tune with a pre-existing tradition in Scottish education which valued philosophy, and where philosophical skills and theology, particularly in its more liberal manifestations, enjoyed a close relationship. Philosophy is also in tune with a more reflective and dialogic approach to education which values dialectic discussion, and celebrates questions and uncertainty.

The move to philosophy gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s as teachers themselves sought credibility for RE in secondary schools by adopting the same criteria for educational validity in place for other subjects. This also led to the rejection of the confessional approach on the grounds that this didn't engage pupils or allow them to autonomously or rationally develop their own beliefs. A new kind of religious literacy was advocated, and argued for, in policy documents according to which RE could no longer be a superficial grasp of the phenomena of religion, nor an understanding of ritual and confession from the inside.

After 1972 non-denominational RE religious literacy has taken the form of recognition of the universality of certain questions about the nature of existence and meaning. To this extent religious literacy is a subset of philosophical literacy, an empathetic understanding in pupils of the ubiquity of these questions and a commitment to working out their own responses to them.

At the same time there was an increasing recognition of the value of teaching thinking skills and initiatives such as Philosophy for Children were gaining currency both internationally and in Scottish schools.

The individualistic emphasis on the personal quest or search, evident in RE policy, in which the pupils sought their own sense of 'meaning, value and purpose', required skills of discernment and critical analysis in pupils. The desire for educational credibility manifested itself primarily in a desire for national certification which, in turn, placed value on the assessment of certain skills of analysis and rational reflection. At the same time the multicultural, increasingly secular and increasingly technological reality of life in Scotland was being reflected in the RE classroom. The multifaith presentation of faiths and nonreligious stances demanded the teaching of evaluative skills to pupils. In a way, as soon as RE became a non-confessional presentation of diverse views of reality (religious or otherwise) the subject began to employ increasingly philosophical skills and content. As soon as Christianity was no longer taken to be normative, philosophical skills became a necessary component of RE pedagogy. The study of non-Semitic religions, particularly Buddhism, offered exemplification that morality and supernaturalistic, theistic religion need not be conflated; a view that had increasing currency in an increasingly non-religious zeitgeist. The increasing emphasis on morality also demanded that teachers adopt the lexicon of moral philosophy, particularly as advances in technology represented challenges to traditional ways of moral decision making.

The move towards certification with RE increasingly taught in statutory core time and not as an elective meant that the majority of departments were effectively engaging pupils in moral philosophy at a younger age. Into the 1990s and 2000s this process gained further momentum, both in terms of wider policy discourse which discussed the need for philosophy in schools and in the creation of Higher Still RMPS national qualifications (1999), which represented the formal recognition of philosophy in RE.

Throughout this story of the emergence of philosophy certain individuals have played pivotal roles as writers of teaching materials for RE, members of exam boards and academics who favour a philosophical approach to the subject. These people (some of whom have been interviewed as part of this research) have, in turn, been influenced by the social reality of Scotland and argued for a form of RE that is increasingly dialogic and philosophical to reflect their perception of this reality.

Whether philosophy has emerged or re-emerged in Scottish education depends on your viewpoint. To suggest that this phenomenon is the continuation of the Enlightenment or as a means to navigate postmodernity is perhaps too bold.

As RE in Scotland in 2011 enters into the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence, a curricular vision that places a great deal of emphasis on thinking skills, and the development of values, the subject, as it has evolved, seems well placed to meet these requirements. All the more so, given the place of philosophy and philosophical skills within it.

The researcher's view is that the emergence of philosophy in RE has, on the surface, happened for prosaic reasons in that it has been a way in which the RE profession sought to gain credibility for the subject and their profession in circumstances which were often hostile to their continued existence. However, this belies a more profound reason for the emergence of philosophy, which relates to the incongruity of persisting with solely religious terminology and content in a situation of complexity and antipathy to hegemonic claims to truth. Philosophy, with its connotations of intellectual restraint, objectivity and questioning, in the words of the professor of history interviewed, 'touches the zeitgeist' in a way that more traditional RE simply does not.

That said, the author acknowledges that 'philosophy' can be understood in a myriad ways, one of which is to juxtapose analytic philosophy with the affective, praxis-centred elements of religiosity in such a way that these aspects of religion are put under threat and side-lined. Indeed, Armstrong (2010) argues that since the Enlightenment religion in Europe has sought to adopt rational philosophical justification at the cost of the 'apophatic' aspects, which she feels are closer to true religiosity. The researcher is very sympathetic to the views of Armstrong and in many ways developments in RE in Scotland seem to mirror this development, and the experiential is diminished in favour of the rational.

The researcher feels, however, that philosophy, which is driven by wonder and fundamental curiosity, is not necessarily a threat to a proper understanding (as far as this is possible outside commitment) of religion and that it does provide a navigational tool in a time of confusion and complexity by which young people can make rationally autonomous decisions on matters of morality and metaphysics. One way in which this can be facilitated is simply by the recognition of philosophy in the subject title (something the researcher has lobbied for) so that it is called Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) in all contexts. This title (rather than the title Religious Education, which still reflects primary legislation from 1872) is inclusive and accessible to a society which is no longer of one mind. Perhaps this is born out in the national survey, where there was a correlation between school departments who call themselves RMPS, and uptake (and therefore popularity) for certificate study in the senior school.

Further Research

A number of areas for follow-up research have arisen from the research:

1. Further international and comparative research into developments in RE.
2. Research into pupil perceptions of different pedagogical approaches to RE, including the philosophical approach.
3. Comparative research of Catholic RE and RE in the non-denominational sector.
4. Research into the degree backgrounds and beliefs of RE teachers.
5. Research into the impact of RE. Does it lead to empathetic understanding or to a relativised and largely secular worldview?

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