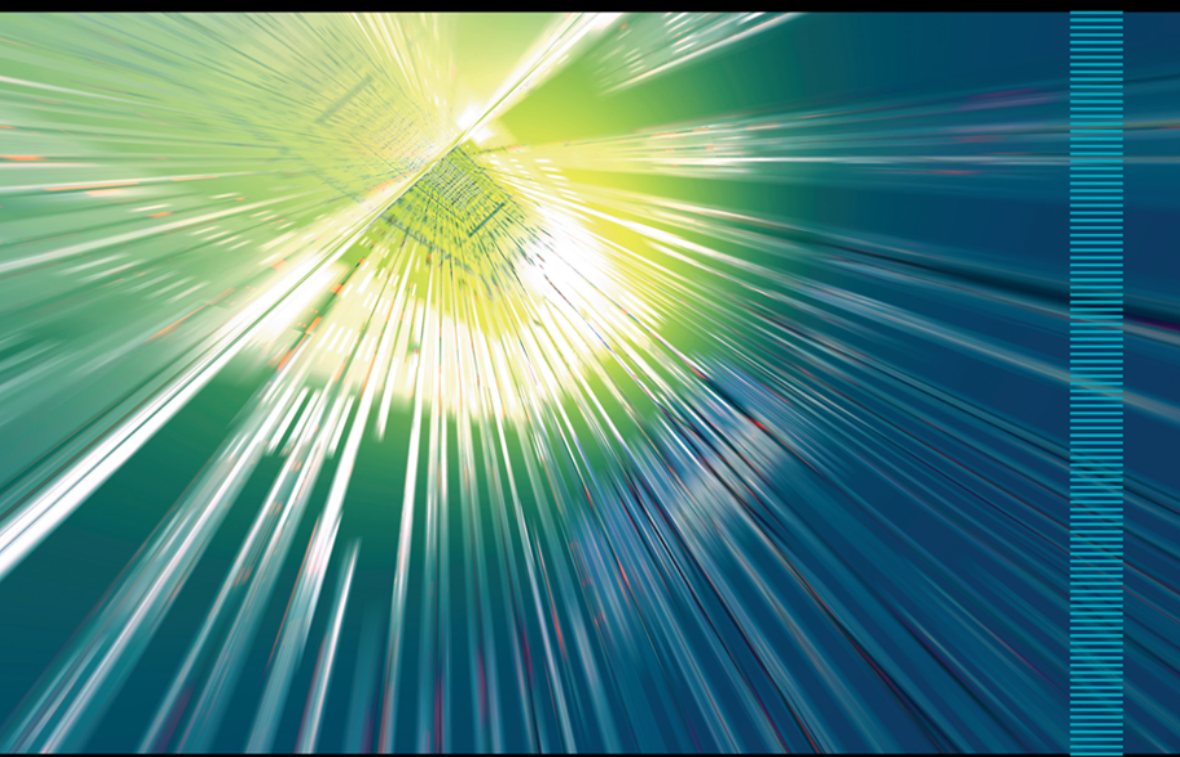
ROUTLEDGE

Religion in the Primary School

ETHOS, DIVERSITY, CITIZENSHIP

FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURES OF EDUCATION



PETER J. HEMMING

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Religion in the Primary School

Religion and its relationship to schooling is an issue that has become more and more topical in recent years. In many countries, developments such as the diversification of state school sectors, concerns about social cohesion between ethnic and religious groups, and debates about national identity and values have raised old and new questions about the role of religion in education. While the significance of this issue has been reflected in renewed interest from the academic community, much of this work has continued to be based around theoretical or pedagogical debates and stances, rather than evidence-based empirical research.

This book aims to help address this gap by exploring the social and political role of religion in the context of the primary school. Drawing on original ethnographic research with a child-centred orientation, comparisons are drawn between Community and Roman Catholic primary schools situated within a multi-faith urban area in the UK. In doing so, the study explores a number of ways in which religion has the potential to contribute to everyday school life, including through school ethos and values, inter-pupil relations, community cohesion and social identity and difference. At the centre of the analysis are two key sociological debates about the significance of religion in late modern societies. The first is concerned with the place of religion in public life and the influence of secularisation and post-secularism on the relationship between religion and schooling. The second relates to the increasingly multi-faith nature of many national populations and the implications for religious citizenship in educational settings.

Religion in the Primary School will be a useful resource for academics, researchers and students as a key addition to existing knowledge in the disciplines of education, sociology and human geography. It will also be of value to both policy-makers and educationalists interested in the role of religion in schools and the implications for the wider community and society in a range of national contexts.

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Ethos, diversity, citizenship

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This book is dedicated
to my mum

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Series editors' foreword

One of the most remarkable changes over the last two centuries has been the universal development of mass education. With each successive decade, provision has expanded to encompass more learners at more stages in their lives. The ambitions for education systems have also grown to encompass objectives as diverse as personal fulfilment and well-being, cultural transmission, active citizenship, social cohesion and, increasingly, international competitiveness.

The broad range of ambitions and the pace of change have created a climate in which it can be difficult to stand back and make sense of what education is for, and where it should be going. The *Foundations and Futures of Education* series of books provides an opportunity to engage with these fundamental issues in new and exciting ways. The series is broad and interdisciplinary in scope, including historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological and comparative perspectives, as well as work from within the fields of media and cultural studies. The series also reflects wider conceptions of education embedded in concepts such as 'the knowledge economy', 'the learning society' and 'lifelong learning'.

In every volume, the academic rigour of the arguments is balanced with accessible writing, which we hope will engage the interest of those working in and for education, as well as a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although there are few easy answers to many of the questions being asked, we hope that you will find the debates and dialogues interesting, exciting and thought-provoking.

Peter Aggleton, *UNSW, Australia*
Sally Power, *Cardiff University, Wales, UK*
Michael Reiss, *Institute of Education, University of London, England, UK*

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Abbreviations

Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PSHCE	Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education
RE	Religious Education
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

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1 Introduction

Religion and its relationship to schooling is an issue that has become more and more topical over the last few years. In many countries, developments such as the diversification of state school sectors, the effects of increasingly multi-faith populations on public service provision and concerns about social cohesion between ethnic and religious groups have raised old and new questions about the role of religion in education. This book aims to address some of these questions with reference to original empirical research conducted in primary school contexts. Through the employment of an in-depth, ethnographic approach, the study includes a comparison between two state-funded schools – a community primary and a Roman Catholic primary – both in multi-faith localities of an urban area in the North of England. In doing so, it explores a number of ways in which religion has the potential to contribute to everyday school life, including through school ethos and values, inter-pupil relations, community cohesion and social identity and difference. At the centre of the analysis are two key sociological debates about the significance of religion in late modern societies and these are introduced in the next section with reference to examples from around the world. The chapter will then move on to provide a brief background on religion and schooling in the UK and touch on some of the debates and controversies in this area. Finally, it will provide an overview of the aims and structure of the book as a whole.

Religion and education

Religion and education have often been intertwined in quite significant ways. Many of today's world-leading educational institutions were originally established by religious scholars, or with particular religious principles at their core. For example, Harvard University in the United States was initially concerned with the training of Congregationalist and Unitarian clergy following its establishment in the seventeenth century. Although contemporary educational projects have often adopted a more secular flavour, the importance of religion for understanding education has not diminished. Even countries that claim a strict division between 'Church' and State, along with a purely secular education system, face difficult debates and controversies about the role of religion in and

around education. There are a number of ways that religion remains prominent in educational landscapes today, three of which are briefly considered below with reference to examples drawn from the international stage.

The first rather visible example in which religion intersects with education is through the faith status or foundation of educational institutions, whether these are schools, colleges or universities, and the religious ethos, values and practices associated with them. One issue that has caused a lot of recent controversy in this area is the establishment or expansion of the state-funded Islamic school sector in many Western nations. Bugg and Gurran (2011) draw on two Australian case studies to highlight the resistance that plans for new Islamic schools often face at the local level. Although such schools are generally classed as 'private' in Australia, they are nevertheless eligible to receive a certain amount of state funding. The authors show how many of the concerns expressed through planning consultations for these schools were often focused, if implicitly, on potential social and community impacts, rather than technical or practical issues. These concerns included fears about the changing demographic character of local neighbourhoods, the dangers of segregation between different cultural and religious communities, and the perceived likelihood of increasing youth violence and anti-social behaviour. Similar resistance to Islamic schools, related to issues such as rights, citizenship, identity and social cohesion, have also been documented in other local and national contexts (e.g. Dwyer and Meyer 1995, Tinker 2009).

A second area of education in which religion often features prominently is the curriculum, both in terms of the discrete subjects taught and the significance of religious doctrine for the knowledge conveyed. Religious Education (RE), its place in the curriculum and its content and coverage (including the balance between different religious traditions), is an obvious topic of interest here (e.g. see Cush 2007). Yet it is the influence of religion on and in other subjects, such as science and sex education, that has tended to make the headlines in many countries. In particular, there has been a longstanding debate in the United States about the teaching of creationism or 'intelligent design' in science lessons, as a valid alternative to theories of evolution. Advocates of creationism often argue that secular schools, in embracing the teaching of evolution, are actually educating from an explicitly liberal position, rather than promoting neutrality. This could, they argue, be interpreted as a subversion of the religious beliefs of children, and discrimination against particular religious positions (Collins 2006). Many of the legal challenges to the privileging of evolution have failed, mainly because creationism has been viewed by the courts as a specific religious perspective, rather than an accepted universal scientific truth. However, creationists have instead recently focused their efforts on influencing states' educational guidelines or repackaging creationism as 'intelligent design' (Moore 2007). Whatever the future developments in this debate, it is one that is unlikely to go away anytime soon (e.g. see Reiss 2011).

The third and final example is concerned with the religious identities of students and their relationships with other students, educators and the institutional