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Teachers' perspectives on collaborative teaching about the 'Big Questions' in secondary schools: The silent treatment

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Background

There is much talk about how science teachers should conduct lessons on how the universe began and how life began, given that a proportion of pupils will have religious beliefs relating to these topics. In this debate, it is often said that ideally, discussions about the relationships between science and religion should take place in religious education and not science education classes.

Research Questions

In this paper, we explore the question of whether ideas and questions raised by science teaching are taken into religious education classes for further enquiry.

- Given that science and RE are generally taught by different teachers at secondary school, in what ways, if any, do teachers from the two subjects collaborate when planning their teaching?
- In the views of teachers, how do pupils understand the relationship between science and religion?
- In the views of teachers, how do pupils respond to the teaching they receive on topics like 'How the universe began' and 'How life began' which are addressed by both subjects.
- In the views of teachers, do pupils have questions about the relationship between science and religion on these topics and if so, are pupils provided with opportunity to explore their questions in either or both classrooms?

Methods

The paper draws on semi-structured interviews with science and RE teachers from four secondary schools in geographically diverse parts of England (one RE teacher and one science teacher from each school).

The schools were a Church school in the centre of a small city, a large comprehensive in the suburb of a major city, a smaller comprehensive school in a coastal town and an Independent Grammar school in a rural town.

The schools were contacted by email to the Head teacher and the teachers who took part in the study were selected by the Head teacher.

Frame

constructivism/interpretivism/phenomenography

Research findings

Our findings in this small study seem to show a lack of communication between the departments and a lack of familiarity by science teachers and RE teachers about what is taught in the other classroom

on topics that are common to both. We then identify some of the reasons why teaching on the 'Big Questions' is disjointed, as currently delivered by science and RE teachers.