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## **Human Rights in the English Secondary School Curriculum**

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### **Background**

This paper reports new research about the place of human rights in English Religious education (RE) and Citizenship education (CE) curriculum documentation for secondary schools in the 11-16 age range. There have been a number of important theoretical papers on the role of religion and human rights (Gearon, 2008) and the potential affiliation between RE and Human Rights Education (HRE) (Guyette, 2009). There have been studies of the significance of human rights in compulsory RE in Norway (Hagesæther, Gunhild and Sandsmark, Signe 2006).

### **Research Questions**

What is the place of human rights in English Religious education (RE) and Citizenship education (CE) curriculum documentation for secondary schools in the 11-16 age range

### **Methods**

There has been some important research on the RE and human rights. For example:

Gearon, L. (2008) Religion, politics and pedagogy: historical contexts. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30, 93-102.

Guyette, F. W. (2009) Human rights education and religious education: from mutual suspicion to elective affinity. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 31, 129-139.

Hagesæther, Gunhild and Sandsmark, Signe (2006) Compulsory education in religion—the Norwegian case: an empirical evaluation of RE in Norwegian schools, with a focus on human rights, *British Journal for Religious Education* Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 275–287

Jackson, R and Fujiwara, S (2007) Towards religious education for peace, *British Journal for Religious Education* Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 1-14

The links between religion and rights are well documented:

An-Na'im, A. A. (2003) Human Rights, Religion and Secularism. IN RUNZO, J., MARTIN, N. M. & SHARMA, A. (Eds.) *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the world religions*. Oxford, Oneworld.

Fadl, K. A. E. (2003) The human rights commitment in modern Islam. IN RUNZO, J., MARTIN, NANCY M AND SHARMA, ARVIND (Ed.) *Human rights and responsibilities in the world religions*. Oxford, Oneworld.

Gearon, L. (Ed.) (2002) *Human Rights & Religion: A Reader*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press.

Gearon, L. (2008) Religion, politics and pedagogy: historical contexts. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30, 93-102.

Guyette, F. W. (2009) Human rights education and religious education: from mutual suspicion to elective affinity. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 31, 129-139.

Khaled, A. E. F. (2003) The human rights commitment in modern Islam. Runzo, J., Martin, N. M. & Sharma, A. (Eds.) (2003)

Martin, N. M. (2002) Rights, Roles and Reciprocity in Hindu Dharma. Runzo, J., Martin, N. M. & Sharma, A. (Eds.) (2003)

Perry, M. (1998) The Idea of Human Rights, Oxford, OUP.

Runzo, J. (2003) Secular rights and religious responsibilities. in Runzo, J., Martin, N. M. & Sharma, A. (Eds.) (2003)

Runzo, J., Martin, N. M. & Sharma, A. (Eds.) (2003) Human Rights and Responsibilities in the world religions, Oxford, Oneworld.

However there has not been an analysis of the place of rights in the statutory Agreed Syllabus and a comparison of the treatment of human rights in RE and CE, the main secondary curriculum areas where it features. This research examined a sample of 40 of the 151 Agreed Syllabi, the non statutory National Framework for RE (QCA, 2004), the Citizenship Education National Curriculum (QCA, 2007) and the GCSE specifications for Religious Studies and Citizenship Studies.

### **Frame**

The research searched for references to rights, human rights, human worth and dignity in those curriculum documents and compared the findings with links between religion and rights identified in the literature (An-Na'im, 2003, Fadl, 2003, Khaled, 2003, Martin, 2002, Runzo, 2003, Runzo et al., 2003, Gearon, 2002, Perry, 1998).

### **Research findings**

The paper discusses the findings of the review noting some theoretical and practical issues. It observes that across the secondary curriculum as a whole, the treatment of human rights is inconsistent and dislocated. The values and beliefs that underpin some commitments to human rights may be examined in RE, although the connection with human rights might not be made. The political and legal human rights structures are explored in CE as legislative and constitutional elements but they are not linked to beliefs. In terms of the application of rights, RE and CE divide the areas. Personal, medical and scientific moral issues are explored in RE while the application to issues of employment and commerce and global issues feature more prominently in CE. The paper concludes that important insights on human rights may be lost by these dislocations. Some bridging between the subjects would more appropriately reflect the connections between religion and rights and provide a more connected learning context for children exploring human rights.