THE CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAM IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

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Abstract

The Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education highlights the important contribution that Religious Education can make in the area of community cohesion by exploring how beliefs and practices vary between and within religious traditions, how they change over time and are influenced by cultural contexts. In this study the focus is the teaching of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4, and the way in which Islam is represented across schooling and teaching, both textually and pedagogically. Study of the literature associated to Islam and education raised a number of issues relating to the way in which Islam may be variably constructed for educational purposes in Religious Education. This study seeks to investigate the sources of the construction of Islam in Religious Education, and focuses on the role of publishers, exam boards and curriculum mongers, and teachers. In this regard the author considers whether the specific construction constrains the practice of teachers, is accommodated or rejected by them. The theoretical foundation of this study is Social Constructionism, the sociological theory of knowledge which considers how social phenomena arise in social contexts. Factors considered here were the Westernized-Christianized perception of Islam, the perception of the Muslim believer, and a striving for a socially acceptable consensual representation within the school curriculum. Methodology consisted of interviewing RE teachers and observing RE lessons along with a content analysis of associated resources. The results indicated that the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4 appeared to be a consensual representation, presented homogeneously, and therefore distorted. This construction was evident in text books and other resources employed by teachers, whether those resources were produced by non-Muslims or Muslims. Syllabuses often reinforced this construction. Teachers recognized the consensual construction. They also acknowledged that they often ‘over-compensated’ when teaching Islam, in an attempt to dispel negative stereotypes currently existing in the wider society. This study concludes that ‘curriculum Islam’ is a distortion which ignores difficult, challenging issues and which attempts to create community cohesion by stealth. This study suggests that this construction is likely to have the opposite effect. It is suggested here that, in order to create understanding, empathy and social cohesion in a multi-faith society, a realistic construction of Islam needs to be presented: one which seeks to address diversity, difference and conflicting
issues of truth.
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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
A note on Referencing
For the convenience of the reader, bibliographic items and secondary sources used in the thesis are presented as a single alphabetical sequence of references.

Introduction
Since September 2007 all schools have been required to promote community cohesion across the curriculum. Religious Education, in particular, has been highlighted as a subject area in which an important contribution can be made in this regard. This research project seeks to investigate the sources of the construction of Islam in Religious Education at Key Stages 3 and 4, and focuses on the role of publishers, exam boards, curriculum mongers, and teachers. The research is particularly concerned with the way in which Islam is represented across schooling and teaching, both textually and pedagogically, and considers whether, in the light of the community cohesion agenda, teachers are constrained by the specific construction of Islam represented in text books and resources and by locally agreed and exam syllabi, or whether they accommodate this construction.

The aims of the project were:

1. To explore the extent to which the construction of Islam in the classroom is determined by outside influences such as exam boards, curriculum mongers, text books and other resources. In this context to investigate whether the construction of Islam leans towards a Western-Christian construction.
2. To assess whether a community cohesion agenda leads to a construction of Islam that is diverse and fluid, or one which is consensual and static and to examine whether, in a bid to dispel negative stereotypes, and for the purpose of community cohesion, a ‘socially acceptable’ Islam is constructed.
3. To explore whether this constrains teachers, or whether they willingly accommodate or reject this construction.
4. To investigate the extent to which pedagogy influences construction and whether the dominance of a phenomenological approach leads to a consensual construction of Islam which ignores the controversial and disregards conflicting
issues of truth.

In order to comprehend the issues at the heart of this research project, it is important to contextualise the research within the historical framework of Religious Education, and the changes in Religious Education in England that have occurred over time. This has seen a shift in the understanding behind the rationale for Religious Education, which has been a move from a ‘confessional’ model, to one which emphasises ‘social cohesion’.

1.1 Confessional to Social Cohesion: Religious Education From 1944

The 1944 Education Act legislated that Religious Education was to be compulsory in British schools. Wright argues that the purpose behind this legislation was to bring healing to a war torn nation, ‘… it sought to re-establish that golden age, lost in the folly of the twentieth century, when Christianity provided the moral and spiritual backbone of the country’ (Wright, 1993: 14. See also Grace, 1978: 18). Consequently, Religious Education was confessional, biblically based, and particularly concerned with those texts dealing with ethics.

Wright (1993) highlights a number of different methodologies that have been applied in the teaching of Religious Education since 1944, and the rationale behind them. He suggests that by the 1960’s the explicit confessional model had been replaced by an ‘implicit’ model which sought to make the confessional model more relevant by starting from the pupils’ own experience and attempting to build a bridge by which a new understanding of the Christian faith could be attained.

In time this method was subjected to criticism both on educational grounds, and from members of faith communities. In 1967 a department of Religious Studies was established at the University of Lancaster under Ninian Smart. This was the first of its kind in a British university. Smart argued for a method of teaching Religious Studies which was based on the work of earlier European phenomenologists. The phenomenological approach adopted by Smart sought to understand the religion of another by suspending one’s own presuppositions and so grasp the religious belief of
another from their own perspective. In order to achieve this Smart proposed that religions be studied through six (later seven) distinct phenomena.

The phenomenological approach became normative in British universities and then schools. It was far-removed from the earlier confessional approach with a focus which was no longer on the moral teaching of Christianity, but a world religions approach. This had been influenced by the increasing plurality of British society. The purpose of Religious Education was to engender understanding and empathy, and not to convert. This point was made in a Schools Council paper of 1971:

> Religious education uses the tools of scholarship to enter into an empathetic experience of the faith of individuals and groups. It does not seek to promote any one religious viewpoint but it recognises that the study of religion must transcend the purely informative (Schools’ Council, 1971: 73).

The 1985 government sponsored Swann Report stated that the phenomenological approach was the most appropriate way of teaching Religious Education in a pluralist society, opposing the idea that had been put forward by some in the Islamic faith who were arguing for single-faith Islamic schools. It argued that the phenomenological approach proved the,

> ... best and only means of enabling all pupils, from whatever religious background, to understand the nature of religious belief, the religious dimension of human experience and the plurality of faiths in contemporary Britain (Swann, 1985: 518).

Whilst the phenomenological approach continues to be influential in the teaching of Religious Education, other models have emerged and enjoyed support. Wright draws attention to the ‘spiritual model’, reflecting that just as the ‘implicit model’ sought to go beyond the confessional, and the explicit phenomenological model sought to go beyond the implicit, so the ‘spiritual model’ sought to exceed the phenomenological approach by, ‘drawing out the relevance of religious traditions to individual and social life by starting from the spiritual experience and concerns of children’ (Wright, 1993: 18). Whilst this approach has been significant, its emphasis on spirituality and psychology has led to some opposition, not least among those who favour the phenomenological approach.
In recent years a more conceptual approach associated with Cooling and Wright has enjoyed some support, along with the ethnographic approach of Jackson. (Cooling, 1994; Jackson, 1997; 2004).

The clauses relating to Religious Education in the 1988 Education Reform Act are given by way of amendments to the 1944 Act. It legislated that all maintained schools and sixth form colleges must provide Religious Education and collective worship. It further stated that Religious Education syllabuses should:

Reflect the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of other principle religions represented in Great Britain. (DES, 1988: 8.3).

Supporters of the phenomenological approach argue that this clause has radically altered the ethos of Religious Education since it redefines the relationship of Christianity to other world faiths, implicitly placing it in a position of superiority and moving away from an empathetic understanding which sought to focus upon common concepts, understandings and features. Nonetheless, this Act significantly referred to Religious Education, replacing the term Religious Instruction, an idiom which had implied indoctrination.

Under the 1988 Act all local education authorities were obliged to establish Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACRE), which would consist of experts from diverse religious groups who would advise on syllabuses and collective worship. All County Schools were to provide Religious Education within the framework provided by their local SACRE. Grant Maintained Schools were to provide Religious Education in accordance with a locally-agreed syllabus, but not necessarily the one adopted by its own local authority. Schools in the voluntary sector could provide Religious Education in a form which reflected their own faith tradition.

Religious Education was given a unique position. The National Curriculum, along with Religious Education, was to form the ‘basic curriculum’ which all schools were legally
obliged to provide. Subsequent education acts have not substantially altered the provisions of the 1988 Act with regard to the teaching of Religious Education.

It has been argued that whilst the 1988 Act gave Religious Education a unique position as part of the basic curriculum, it nonetheless created an ambiguity (Wright, 1993). Unlike other core subjects it was not subject to nationally-agreed targets or syllabuses. This, Wright argues, allowed for Religious Education to follow one of two paths. Either it would follow the ‘narrow winding lane’, which is the option of greater safety, or it would follow a path which would enable long lasting fulfilment, but which is fraught with the possibility of creating confusion.

The 1988 Act had, for the first time, suggested that Religious Education had to be justified on educational grounds, in the same way as any curriculum subject. This was further emphasised by later national initiatives. In 1994 two model syllabuses were produced by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA). These included material on the six principle religions in Britain which was available to be used and adapted by local SACRE. The attainment targets which it included: ‘learning about religion’ (AT1) and ‘learning from religion’ (AT2), became widely used in Religious Education. The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DES) in 2004 and produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was generally favourably received. Its intention was to help support local syllabuses and ensure clarity, guidance and support. Both the Model Syllabuses and the National Framework suggest that by the end of Key Stages 3 pupils will have encountered all of the six principle religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism) in ‘sufficient depth’. It also allows for the study of other religious traditions.

Since September 2007 all schools have been required to promote community cohesion across the curriculum. Religious Education is seen to have an important contribution to make in this respect, ensuring that it promotes community cohesion and takes account of diversity in the context of the school community, the local community, the national community and the global community.
Religious Education has, therefore, changed dramatically since the 1944 Act. The literature suggests that the move from Religious Instruction, which included little educational rationale, to Religious Education, which seeks to justify the subjects’ inclusion in the curriculum on educational grounds, continues to cause some confusion. There appears to be some uncertainty as to what Religious Education is for, and the social cohesion agenda has further muddied the water. Alongside this, and to some extent because of it, one finds many divergent teaching methods that are applied. Both this confusion and diversity are reflected in the perceptions of teachers, and doubtless impact on the way in which religions are constructed for educational purposes.

1.1 The Theory of Social Construction

The theoretical foundation of this study is ‘social constructionism’. This can be defined as:

A theory of knowledge that considers how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. A social construction (social construct) is a concept or practice that may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it, but is regarded by the sociologist as an invention or artifact of a particular culture or society (Gilbert, 2008:514).

Abdel Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) the Islamic philosopher-historian was among the first to focus on the idea that the construction of society was dependent upon historical and cultural context. He puts forward this hypothesis in his great theoretical prolegomena to the study of history, the Muqaddima, written c. 1377. In many ways Ibn Khaldun was the precursor of modern sociologists, although the extent to which he directly affected modern sociology is open to debate. Ibn Khaldun, it will be noted later, also introduced the idiom asabiyyah, often translated ‘social cohesion’. It is, perhaps, significant that the first Western translation of the Muqaddima is undertaken in nineteenth century France, the homeland of Auguste Comte (the ‘father’ of modern
sociology) and Emile Durkheim.

The term ‘social construction’ first entered the sociological vocabulary through the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. They were part of a long line of sociologists working in the field of the sociology of knowledge who were seeking to answer the question: ‘How does reality come to be?’ Prominent in this field were Max Scheler (1874-1928), Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), and Alfred Shultz (1899-1959). Berger and Luckmann’s particular contribution to the sociology of knowledge was the suggestion that reality was constructed through *human interaction*. For them social construction can be understood as the process by which human beings creatively shape reality through social interaction (Macionis and Plummer, 2008). In Berger and Luckmann’s work *The Social Construction of Reality*, first published in 1966, which is heavily influenced by Durkheim, they argue that society is a human product and an objective reality. Social construction is defined as a sociological theory of knowledge through which one considers how social phenomena develop in different social contexts. They contend that all knowledge, including the most basic knowledge of everyday reality, derives from and is maintained by social interaction.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim that the reality of everyday life has a privileged place among other realities and appears to be ordered and independent of any apprehension: ‘I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena is prearranged in patterns that seems independent of my apprehension of them and impose themselves upon the latter’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:35). Furthermore, the reality of everyday life shows itself to be a world which is
intersubjective, a world which the individual shares with others and which takes place in
time and space. What Berger and Luckmann were seeking to do was to take those things
which individuals might take for granted as ‘real’ and show how these seemingly
obvious realities might differ depending upon culture and context, and even among
different people within the same culture (Giddens, 2006:152).

Social constructionists have applied Berger and Luckmann’s ideas to a wide variety of
topics, from medical ethics, to gender studies, and sexuality. They seek to illuminate
how societies create what is ‘real’ (Giddens, 2006). Berger and Luckmann themselves
specifically applied their theories to the fields of language (through which interaction is
primarily exercised) social order, religion and the study of religion. Of particular
importance to this study is the application of social constructionist theory to religion and
the study of religion.

Social Construction and Religion
It was the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) who first argued that religions were
social constructs. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, published in 1912, he put
forward the view that religion was a created device to meet the societal needs of
humanity, and to provide social cohesion and moral responsibility. He argued that the
sacred is nothing more than a personification of human society. Whilst acknowledging
that religion may have been the driving force for all that is essential in society, this is
because the very idea of society is the ‘soul’ of religion.
Berger and Luckmann’s major case study of social construction was religion, and in 1967 Berger published *The Social Reality of Religion*, in which he applied social construction theory to the field of religion and suggested that religion itself is constructed in response to need. Building on the reflections of Sigmund Freud and Emile Durkheim, Berger argues that one of the primary functions of religion in society is to serve as a legitimizing force, reinforcing and maintaining the socially defined reality. More recently James Beckford has argued that, ‘the meanings attributed to religion are, in part, a product of social interaction and negotiation at the level of individuals, groups, organizations and whole societies’ (Beckford, 2003: 197). Macionis (2007) suggests that all social interaction amounts to a complex negotiation that builds reality. Furthermore, although most everyday situations might involve some agreement as to what is happening, individuals’ perceptions are based upon divergent interests and intentions (Macionis, 2007:100). In the context of religion, therefore, ‘construction’ can be dependent upon context, by differences of interest and intention, as well as by outside factors. Understanding does not depend upon objectivity but upon subjective interpretation, and this is dependent upon one’s definition of reality (Henslin, 2006:97). Macionis (2007) points to the nation of Turkey, by way of example. Here we have a nation with a predominantly Muslim population, but which has also broadly embraced Western culture, and so women in this culture confront very different definitions of what is ‘feminine’. Hence, whilst one might construct reality from one’s surrounding culture and context, the diversity within that culture and context might ensure conflict, tension and choices (Macionis, 2007:102).
Social Construction and the Study of Religion

Beckford (2003) argues that the meanings that are attributed to religion are, at least to some extent, the result of social interaction and negotiation between individuals, groups and societies. Social constructionist approaches, he contends, seek to understand how the terms ‘religion’, ‘sacred’ and ‘spiritual’ are used, and how they vary across different groups of people, different societies, and over time and space.

Engler (2005) argues against the way in which Constructionism has become the focus in a large number of Religious Studies publications. At the centre of his argument lies a concern that scholars of religion have failed to understand the nature of Constructionism, interpreting it as relativistic. Furthermore, Engler argues that instead of indicating what is constructed, and from what and how, the theory of Constructionism is taken for granted and never elucidated. He states that: ‘Constructionist talk is common in Religious Studies, constructionist work is not’ (2005:31). Engler’s contention is that Constructionism is a specific theoretical approach which has very clear methodological implications, an approach which determines what is constructed, from what it is constructed, and how. It is not simply a ‘general recognition that things depend on context’ (2005:31). In this regard Engler contrasts what he refers to as ‘weak constructionism’, which is what tends to happen and which is of little use, from ‘strong constructionism’, which is firmly rooted in a clear understanding of what is meant by constructionism. Weak constructionism, he suggests, leads to the common tendency to dismiss the very concept of religion on the grounds that it is a modern Western construct, of which he is highly critical.
Rationale for the choice of social construction as the paradigm of this study

Following the classic work of Berger and Luckmann the social construction of experience or reality and the way this is transmitted as knowledge has been observed, not least in Religious Education. The phenomenological approach to the study of religion associated with Ninian Smart has been the subject of a sustained critique by a number of scholars, not least on the grounds that it claimed to be a neutral approach. This is explored by Derrida (1983) and I’Anson (2010), both of whom challenge the claim to neutrality and suggest that the phenomenological approach deploys categories which make Western sense of Eastern faiths. Nonetheless the phenomenological approach has clearly affected the construction of religions through syllabi and textual resources used in the teaching of Religious Education.

Stern (2006) comments on the failure of Religious Education to tackle issues of controversy and conflict both between and within religions, in an attempt to construct something that is ‘safe’ and ‘positive’. The same point has been made by Ofsted (2007). Likewise Hayward (2006), in her analysis of the teaching of Christianity, argues that the construction of Christianity in the curriculum is one which is consensual and devoid of conflict or controversy. Gearon (2002, 2004) also laments the failure of Religious Education to tackle difficult issues, such as the complicity of Christian churches in colonialism. By so doing Religious Education, he argues, assumes a public relations role in its construction of religions. The importance of social cohesion as a primary purpose of Religious Education, as stated by Ofsted (2007), carries with it the danger that the teaching of contradictory or potentially challenging aspects of religion will be further sacrificed in order to construct an understanding of religions as being positive and safe.
The theoretical foundation of this thesis is social constructionism. The theory allows us to challenge the notion that both ‘religion’ and ‘Religious Education’ are ‘givens’ to be accepted as objective reality. Rather, they can be regarded as ‘constructed’ by members of the social world and which, although appearing to be objective, are intersubjective, an analysis pushed further by Giddens (2006). In arguing this I am accepting that the members of the group who achieve this construction are able to select from available knowledge the elements which compose their desired construction. Hayward (2006) argued that the construction of Christianity for educational purposes, which she called ‘Curriculum Christianity’, presented the faith as being consensual and free from conflict. My research is based upon the thesis that a particular group (government, curriculum mongers, exam and text book writers, teachers) have constructed ‘Curriculum Islam’ and have selected from the available knowledge and sources those elements which support their construction.

This research project seeks to understand the sources of the construction of Islam in Religious Education at Key Stage 3 and 4, not least in light of the social cohesion agenda. Of particular concern in this respect are the Western-Christian perception of Islam and the striving for a construction of Islam which is socially acceptable and consensual. Of particular consideration will be the extent to which teachers are constrained by external factors, or whether they accommodate or reject them in the construction of Islam in the classroom.
CHAPTER TWO: ISSUES IN THE LITERATURE
Far upon the mountain I saw a beast.
When I came nearer I saw that it was a man.
When I came closer still, I saw that it was my brother. (Hunt, 1983, p. 99)

2.1 Introduction

The quotation reproduced above is significant to this study for a number of reasons. First, it derives from an article defending the teaching of Islam written in response to a suggestion that Islam should *not* be included in the Religious Education syllabus. Second, in the context of the article as a whole, it raises issues relating to the nature of religion itself, hinting *perhaps* that religions represent the divergent paths of humanity toward a common goal. If this is overstating Hunt’s position, there is no doubt that he *is* suggesting that when one *understands* ‘the other’ he ceases to be ‘a beast’ and instead becomes ‘my brother’. This raises important issues concerning the nature of religion, what Religious Education is for, and the way in which religions are constructed for educational purposes. These questions will be at the heart of this thesis.

2.2 What is a Religion?

In chapter 1 the way in which Religious Education had moved from a confessional model in which the focus was Christianity, to a ‘world religions’ model was considered. This doubtless had implicit issues surrounding the nature of how one understood a religion. In a sense Ninian Smart had sought to answer this question through the phenomenological approach but his approach had been subjected to much criticism. Wilson (1982) suggests that religious educationalists have not thought through clearly what constitutes a religion. The ‘world religions’ approach leads to a method, he argues, which encourages a ‘shop window tour of various faiths’ (Wilson, 1982: 62). In this sense religions are seen as being of essentially the same substance and a kind of pick and mix attitude is encouraged. Wilson favours a more interpretive approach which defines religion in terms of ‘awe’ and ‘wonder’ where ‘…pupils can become more able to bring their feelings to consciousness and to inspect them critically.’ (Wilson, 1982: 65).
Jackson (1997) argues that at the root of the problem with the ‘world religions’ approach is a Western conception of what constitutes a religion. He contends that the very term ‘religion’ in its generic sense, is a relatively modern one which is fundamentally Western and Christian. Drawing upon the previous work of W.C. Smith (1978) he argues that the very phrase ‘world religions’ did not develop until the late 1960s. Smith (1978) had sought to expose the Western-Christian influences on definitions of religion, arguing that these have had an impact on popular understandings of Islam, not least the negative way in which Islam is perceived in some elements of the media. A similar critique is made by I’Anson (2010). He argues that whilst ‘official accounts of what it is to make sense of religion are framed within a rhetoric of neutrality’ (I’Anson, 2010: 105), based upon the claims of the phenomenological approach as being ‘value free’ (a claim made by Ninian Smart) such a claim is not sustainable; not least since one is looking at ‘the other’ from ones’ own perspective, and that perspective is very much Western-Christian. Furthermore, argues I’Anson, Smart’s own dimensions are ‘characteristically Western’. Christianity has a particular understanding of belief which is not universal and cannot, therefore, claim to be neutral.

Jackson (1997) comments that most modern names for religions first appeared in the 19th century and were a Western-Christian invention, which sought to identify ranges of cultural and religious beliefs into ‘generic unities’, thus causing a distorted and confused construction of non-Western religions, seen through the prism of a Western-Christian understanding. Jackson (1997) notes that Islam is an exception to that, in that the term itself drives from the Qur’an and relates to one who has submitted to the will of Allah. Nonetheless, he suggests, in popular Western usage it denotes a unified group of people and this is far removed from its Qur’anic understanding. What Jackson is suggesting is that in its Western understanding ‘Islam’ is regarded more as an entity than something that one does. Smith (1978) suggests that the very word ‘religion’ should be dropped and replaced with ‘faith’, which he defines as an ‘inner religious experience’ and ‘tradition’, by which he means the cumulative tradition. Jackson (1997), however, argues that this notion is too simplistic and does not take into account the way in which each individual might belong to a variety of subgroups, which might be defined in terms of social, cultural and linguistic differences, and which will have an effect on religious life. In this
sense Jackson is suggesting that ‘religion’ is far more complex than is commonly understood: not consensual and static, but full of variety; fluid and active.

Newbegin (1982) also reflects on the question ‘what constitutes a religion?’ and is equally concerned with the way in which generic terms for religious traditions have been adopted in Religious Education. In language which prefigures the later concerns of Philip Barnes concerning issues of truth, Newbegin, in respect of Islam, comments that:

The committed adherent of a universal faith such as Islam cannot, while remaining a faithful Muslim, regard Islam as one of a class called ‘religions’. God sent many messengers - including Moses and Jesus. But Muhammad is the final messenger, and to include the Qur’an as simply one amongst the religious books of mankind is to deny Islam (Newbegin, 1982: 98).

Newbegin contends that in a pluralist society one can understand religion from three perspectives. First, one can look at a religion from the outside looking in. Second, one can look at religions from the point of view of their social function. Third, religions can be understood as being different manifestations of a common experience (this point, however appears to contradict the general thrust of his argument, that religions should be regarded from the perspective of the adherent). Newbegin argues that all three can be seen to be at work in Religious Education.

Newbegin argues that Religious Education teachers should be seeking to help pupils to understand other faiths as the adherents would wish them to be understood. They should seek to encourage pupils to feel the power and beauty of other religious traditions. Clearly this would impact on how religions would be constructed for educational purposes.

An interesting debate has arisen between Andrew Wright and Robert Jackson concerning ‘contextual religious educators’, and which relates directly to perceptions of what constitutes a religion. Wright (2008) is critical of ‘contextual religious educators’ who he argues ‘tend to view discrete religious traditions as artificially constructed from the ordinary experiences of children.’ (2008:3). Instead he argues for the ‘continued
representation of religions as substantial social facts in religious education classrooms.’ (2008:3). Wright is particularly critical of Jackson (2001) and his conclusion that the representation of religions as ‘discrete belief systems should be abandoned in favour of a much looser portrayal of religious traditions and groupings.’ (Jackson, 2001:35). Wright suggests that Jackson’s argument is based upon his perception that the ways in which religions have been portrayed since the Enlightenment, as static, stable systems of belief, is a Western construct and does not represent reality. At the heart of this view, he contends, lies an unease at the grouping of traditions into ‘religions’ – a modern, Western construct. Wright is dismissive of the idea that by naming traditions the West ‘created imaginary social realities’. Indeed:

> The lack of a pressing need for such a term in the medieval context of a largely monolithic Christian culture does not mean that prior to the modern era the world’s religions did not exist as discrete entities (Wright, 2008: 8).

Flood (1996), whilst acknowledging the constraints of definition, not least in the context of Hinduism which is his area of expertise, argues that, ‘while it might not be possible to arrive at a water-tight definition of Hinduism, this does not mean that the term is empty.’ (Flood, 1996:7)

Wright (2008) is critical of Jackson’s suggestion that at the centre of all religious traditions is the experience of ‘living persons’ whose individual expressions of faith create the cumulative traditions.

Jackson (2008) suggests that Wright has misrepresented him as a champion of contextual Religious Education, and has distorted his views. It is, he argues, a ‘caricature’ of his ideas. Indeed he is keen to point out that he does ‘…think that it is possible to give general descriptions of religions … but such descriptions should not be regarded as final or uncontested.’ (2008:14)

Wright continues in his criticism of Jackson, who draws attention to the complexities of the classification of religious traditions, the way in which they can be perceived in different contexts, and the different perspectives of the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ which
renders a definitive representation of a religion impossible. Wright argues that Jackson is suggesting that ‘the best we can hope to do is to construct representations whose significance cannot extend beyond the heuristic task of illuminating individual spiritualities.’ (Wright, 2008:5). He argues that Jackson suggests that the only way in which religion can be represented in the classroom is by interpreting a religious way of life which examines the relationship between groups to which the individual belongs, and the wider religious traditions. This, claims Wright,

… leaves him no alternative but to construct accounts of religions, and to assess their validity by appealing to a consensus amongst the various interested parties, rather than considering the extent to which they adequately describe the socio-cultural reality. (Wright, 2008: 8)

Wright argues that religious traditions should be granted ‘substantial identity’ as ‘robust social facts’ (Wright, 2008:5). In response Jackson (2008) once again suggests that Wright has misrepresented him. Jackson argues that ‘religion’ and ‘religions’ are social and cultural constructs whose meaning has changed over time and differ in various contexts and settings. To refer to religion in this sense does not deny its reality.

2.3 Stereotyping of Islam and Muslims

Edward Said (1978) argues that European knowledge about Eastern cultures has been shaped by the superior power of Western nations. Said suggests that this was particularly true with regard to Islam: Muslims are portrayed as almost subhuman, and the Western image of Islam is heavily biased by colonial attitudes, racism and political exploitation. Jackson (1997), in agreeing with Said, argues that: ‘A key point is that an on-going imbalance of power permits a politically and technologically stronger culture or group to define weaker groups.’ (Jackson, 1997: 56). Likewise Ahsan (1988), in reviewing the history of the study of Islam in the West, concludes that the stereotypes of Islam which are found in the writings of non-Muslims, journalists and the media have not come about on their own but are a continuation, however unintentionally of the legacy of this Western image of Islam which was nurtured by those whom Said termed ‘Orientalists’. Burke (1996) concedes that historically many Western scholars have indeed given a
false impression of Islam. He argues that their method was determined by motive. There was, he suggests, a real desire amongst Western imperialist rulers to understand something of their oriental subjects, many of whom were Muslim. Muslims were, he suggests, studied through the eyes of their Christian overlords, and were therefore, seen as being inferior.

Mabud (1992), in an article investigating the implications of the 1988 Education Reform Act, praises the Act for making statutory the teaching of non-Christian religions, but is critical of the lack of clarity of the clause relating to Christianity, and suggests that the greater weighting on Christianity affords it a dominant and privileged position which might raise questions with regard to the expectation that Religious Education should promote respect, understanding and tolerance. How is this to be achieved, he asks, ‘if other faiths are not accorded the same status in the curriculum as the dominant faith’ (1992:92). Similarly Cox & Cairns (1989) reflect upon the dominance of the Christian faith in determining the content of Religious Education at the local level, with Mabud (1992) highlighting the numerical advantage of Christian representation on SACRE. Indeed Mabud argues that in the education system, ‘…‘Euro-centric’ values are presented as normative, and other cultures (often viewed through this Euro-centric prism) are marginalised or ignored’ (1992:90). Furthermore, suggests Mabud, the fact that within the context of education in the United Kingdom, cultures are regarded from an Anglo-European perspective constituted one of the main reasons for the call from Muslims for separate denominational schools, ‘...where a religious and spiritual ethos will prevail so that the children will have the kind of education which will allow them to grow culturally, morally and spiritually in Islamic universal values that are shared by all the major religions of the world’ (1992:95). The aspiration for Muslim schools and the motivation for this are discussed by Halstead (1986). At the heart of this aspiration is a concern for fairness, and a desire for Islam to be accorded equal status with Christian denominational schools and Jewish schools. Halstead & Taylor (1996) also point to the unease within the Muslim community concerning what it perceives to be Western liberal values underlying education, and argue that this is the major motivation behind moves for Muslim voluntary aided schools. On the other hand there is a suggestion that the distinctive position in Islam of the relationship between knowledge and faith might be
The views of Edward Said et al have been seriously questioned in recent years. Ibn Warraq (2007), in a systematic critique of Said, argues against both his arguments and that of the ‘Saidists’. He suggests that Said and his supporters have wilfully misrepresented the West, and cites many examples, from ancient Greek culture onwards, where Western civilization has accepted ‘foreign ideas’. He argues that, rather than treating Muslims as ‘inferior’ there has been a far greater degree of mutual respect and cross-fertilisation of ideas than Said would allow. He goes so far as to suggest that Said’s misrepresentation of the West ‘taught an entire generation of Arabs the art of self pity,’ and helped to shape the idea of the ‘Evil West’ among many Muslims. This viewpoint is shared by Irwin (2006) in another critique of Said. Burke (1996) also points to examples of good practice in Islamic scholarship, and points out that an ‘outsider’ to the Islamic faith can give fresh insight in an objective way. Schweitzer (2007) makes some interesting observations in relation to stereotyping of Muslims and Islamophobia. In a study conducted in Germany into the concept of religious individualisation and education for tolerance, Schweitzer argues that there is a high degree of individualisation among German youth, by which he means ‘… that people tend to assume that their lives are not predetermined by birth and social origin, and that each and every one has the right and also the responsibility to shape his or her life according to their own wishes and plans.’ (2007:90). One feature of this individualisation is a rejection of organised institutionalised religion in favour of a more personal set of beliefs and practices. In the study there appeared to be very little evidence of prejudice between the major Christian denominations: ‘Yet once they include Islam in their comparisons – something they often did in the interviews even if we did not ask them about Islam – their views change markedly.’ (2007: 93). Muslims were regarded in negative terms, they did not want to become Muslim, they could not even imagine it. Schweitzer suggests that this prejudice was due in no small part to the media. One of the solutions to this prejudice, he suggests, is understanding through dialogue. Kahn-Cheema (1990) also acknowledges the ‘monumental’ efforts that have been made in seeking to learn about, to understand and respect British Muslim children in schools, and acknowledges the significant role of Religious Education and of RE teachers in this respect.
The question ‘What is a religion?’ has clear implications both in respect of what Religious Education is “for”, and in respect of pedagogy. The perception that Religious Education defines religions from a Western Christian perspective, and the supposition that Islam is presented in a stereotypical way, appears to be at the heart of the claim made by some Muslim educators that Islam should not be included in the Religious Education curriculum.

2.4 Islam and the Religious Education Curriculum

Zaki (1982) questions whether Islam should be included in the Religious Education curriculum, arguing that there is a different understanding of ‘knowledge’ between Islam and Western culture. Although his reflections are somewhat dated, Zaki raises some important issues relating to the criticism that Religious Education ‘constructs’ religions from a Western-Christian perspective. To the Muslim, Zaki argues, there is no such thing as ‘secular knowledge’ because ultimately the source of all knowledge is Allah. With this in mind, argues Zaki, when one is studying biology, for example, the student is ultimately learning of the wonder of creation and so will be filled with awe at the creative genius of God. This he contrasts with the Western concept of knowledge, which he suggests has been increasingly secularised and cannot be viewed as ‘many branches of a single tree rooted in the awareness of God.’ (Zaki, 1982:34). The secularisation of knowledge in the West, contends Zaki, is the result of a dichotomy in the Western psyche between a religious Hebraic tradition and a secular Greco-Roman heritage, which has been further confused by Humanism.

At the heart of Zaki’s concerns is the dichotomy between an Islamic understanding of knowledge and that afforded in Western culture. Parker-Jenkins (1995) reflects upon the Islamic understanding of knowledge, ‘premised on the belief that a Divine Being is responsible for the creation of the universe and all individuals are accountable for their personal conduct’(1995:38). Education, she contends, is a process through which personality is developed in preparation for this life and for Akhirah (the afterlife). Education, therefore, is not an ‘end in itself’ (Ashraf, 1994:4). A key feature of the Islamic notion of knowledge is that all knowledge is of God (Parker-Jenkins, 1995:38).
Sarwar (1992) argues that belief in Akhirah and an understanding of responsibility is central. He also suggests that Muslims do not object to certain parts of the curriculum *per se*, but because the methodology adopted is against the guidance of Allah. Education, therefore, ‘begins and ends with the revealed will of God’ (Hulmes, 1989: 35). Husain and Ahraf (1979) argue that: ‘Knowledge divorced from faith is only partial knowledge’ (1979:38).

Mabud (1992), in his article investigating the implications of the 1988 Education Reform Act, raises the question whether the Act is appropriate ‘for a pluralist multi-cultural, multi-faith Britain’, or whether it promotes ‘one particular ideology to the exclusion of others’ (1992:88). He argues that the dominant ideology, though claiming to be ‘neutral’, is in fact a secularist ideology which promotes a way of life and a world view which is at variance with that of all of the major religions. At the heart of this secularist agenda, he argues, is an understanding of humanity as, ‘… the end product of an aimless, Godless, process of evolution, mere earthly creatures, temporal beings possessed of mind and body but no soul or spirit’ (1992:89). In this secularist understanding God is considered to be unscientific and irrational and therefore irrelevant. Mabud argues that this understanding underpins the entire curriculum. Rather than promoting Britain as multi-cultural and multi faith, in which culture and faith are seen to be integrally linked, what is propagated, suggests Mabud, ‘ ...is a kind of secular mono-culturalism which is aimed at achieving social harmony through a process of secularization which marginalizes religions completely (1992:91).

Al-Attas (editor) (1977) reflects upon the dichotomy between religious and secular education systems and contrasts the Islamic understanding of education with secularist and humanist understandings arguing that only religion ‘... provides an all-comprehensive norm of man and an all-inclusive goal for education’ (1977:xii). Al-Attas reflects upon the Islamic notion of education, in which all subjects are seen in the context of faith and the divine will. In contrast, he argues, ‘knowledge’ within Western culture is regarded not in the context of faith, but secularism and rationalism. It is a system which sets ‘... great store upon man’s rational capacity alone to unravel the mysteries of his total environment and involvement in existence’ (1977:21). Similarly, in
contrast to the secularist philosophy, argues Mabud, the religious view ‘speaks of a total human being in whom the sense, mind, intellect and spirit work as part of the whole person’ (1992:89). Ashraf (1985) argues that education in Islam is concerned with the total growth and development of human beings, not just intellectually, but also morally and spiritually. Mabud (1992) agrees that an education which merely concentrates on the material or physical and ignores the spiritual is defective. Mabud (1992) argues that, for the Muslim, education without an awareness of God is meaningless. Furthermore, it is ‘indoctrination into a particular world view’ (1992:90). In respect of secularism and Religious Education, Watson (1987) reflects that, ‘world religions have often been presented in a relativist, secular garb which has rendered such teaching suspect by members of other religions’ (1987: 146). Similarly Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1993) laments the way in which the teaching of various branches of knowledge has become separated from religious values. Husain and Ashraf (1979), writing from a Muslim perspective, argue that education should be ‘... an unfolding of those strengths and sensibilities which draw him [human beings] nearer to God’ (1979: 41). Similarly Bowker (1995), in his interviews with members of the Muslim community in the United Kingdom, presents the view of one interviewee in respect of education thus: ‘Islamic education is education that trains the total personality so that men and women can become true servants of God’ (1995: 139). In this sense, the Islamic view of education is that religious belief should not be confined to Religious Education but, according to Mabud, should embrace ‘the whole area of the curriculum’ from history and geography to mathematics and science, ‘in the same way that the secularist system integrates all subjects in its philosophical framework’ (Mabud, 1992: 90). In this respect Parker-Jenkins (1995) highlights the distinction between an Islamic view of education and a Western view. In Islam, she suggests, knowledge is, ‘... conceived within the context of religion and Qur’anic interpretation, whereas in the Western model of education, religious knowledge is constructed as a discipline in its own right, rather than a subject which permeates the curriculum and establishes the school ethos’ (1995:41). Hulmes (1989) argues that the approach to Religious Education in England, ‘belongs to an Un-Islamic phenomenology’ (1989:31). Halstead (1986) draws a distinction between secular Western education, with its emphasis on rationalism, and Islamic education, with its emphasis on revelation, and Mabud (1992) argues that what is being promoted in education is an atheistic view,
where evolution is taught as fact, and human beings are understood as no more than physical beings and where no other view is discussed. Similarly Yusuf Islam (quoted in Raza, 1993:42) argues that the ‘entire philosophy of state schools is built of Kufr’ (a rejection of God). Raza (1993) argues that schools are intent on providing only a secular interpretation of reality. At the heart of this agenda, argues Mabud (1992), is a belief that the secularization of society is more likely to achieve social cohesion and tolerance than a religious approach. Ashraf (1988) exclaims that this agenda is regarded by Muslim parents as an attempt to ‘brainwash’ Muslim children and ‘uproot them from their cultural moorings’ the effect of which would be greater tension and misunderstanding (1988:71).

A further point of contention for Zaki surrounds the Western idea of what constitutes a ‘religion’. Zaki argues that Islam is more than a ‘religion’, in the Western sense of the definition. It is a din, by which he means a system which regulates every conceivable area of life. This he contrasts with Christianity and Buddhism, by way of example, which, he claims, are only ‘religions’ in a more limited sense of the word. Any study of Islam, he contends, must include every aspect of life, from economics to law and political theory, and not just religious ‘dogma’. Hunt (1983) questions Zaki’s definition of the term din, and does not accept what he regards as Zaki’s denigration of Christianity and Buddhism as being any less all-encompassing than Islam. Hull (1998) argues that there is no evidence to support the claims made by Zaki. Al-Attas agrees with Zaki in distinguishing Islam as a din and argues that religion in this sense ‘... has never taken root in Western civilization due to its excessive and misguided love of the world and secular life and of man and preoccupation with man’s secular destiny’ (1977: 21).

Zaki suggests that multi-faith Religious Education only serves to confuse, not least if a large number of religions are studied (Zaki, 1982: 35). He suggests that ‘religion’ deals with abstract ideas which are difficult for the teacher to teach and for the pupil to learn, particularly if the curriculum is ‘overloaded’ with six world religions. Hunt (1983) concedes that Religious Education deals with abstract concepts, but argues that teachers are well equipped to deal with this. Acknowledging that the curriculum can be
overloaded, he suggests that a maximum of three world religions should be taught, although he does not specify which three, and on what basis any choice should be made.

Hull (1988) suggests that at the root of the arguments raised by some writers surrounding multi-faith Religious Education is a misunderstanding of what Religious Education is for, and a fear that it is designed to evangelise and reinforce negative stereotypes. The trend towards multi-faith Religious Education, Hull argues, is particularly challenging for more recently established religions in Britain such as Islam and Sikhism: ‘This is partly because of the beliefs about education which lie behind the movement for religions in schools, beliefs which are on the whole European, not Asian.’ (Hull, 1998:11).

This misunderstanding as to the purpose of Religious Education is implied by Noibi (1999) who suggests that any syllabus of Islam should contribute to the moral and spiritual development of all children. This is based on his view that Islam does not separate the spiritual from the mundane; the Divine Law is all-encompassing. He argues that an understanding of Islam - the exemplary example of the Prophet, the Islamic ideal of the family, and Islamic prohibition of alcohol and drugs - would be of immense benefit to the spiritual and moral development of pupils and society as a whole.

Zaki (1982) argues whether a non-Muslim teacher would be able to adequately teach Islam, or whether he or she would be guided by their own subjectivity. He also contends that many Religious Education teachers are inadequately trained to teach the subject, arguing that partial understanding is worse than none at all. Ahsan (1988) contends that in order for Islam to be taught well there is a need for teachers to have an in-depth knowledge: from those who are sympathetic to, and have a ‘right vision’ of Islam. At the heart of this debate there appears to be a misunderstanding of what Religious Education is for and a perception that a ‘right vision’ of Islam could only be presented by a Muslim teacher. Hunt (1983) accepts that a lack of adequate training has been an historic problem, but suggests that the situation has improved considerably in more recent years. At any event:
A teacher who chooses to teach multi-faith religious education … does not make this decision to malign Islam … His reason … is usually a sincere belief that in a world full of prejudice and misunderstanding, he can help broaden a child’s grasp of religion and of the faith of others. (Hunt, 1983: 99)

Ahsan (1988) argues that most materials used for the teaching of Islam are produced by non-Muslims, and sometimes reinforce negative images. He calls for greater cooperation between the Islamic community and religious educators in the production of syllabuses, written material, and other teaching aids. It is certainly the case that most textbooks and resources produced for the teaching of Islam are produced by non-Muslims. This research project will later consider whether this creates a construction of Islam which is unfavourable to Islam. Ahsan also calls for more Muslim Religious Education teachers, and for a ‘…proper reorientation of the existing syllabus of teaching Islam … to rectify the situation and gain the confidence of the Muslim community,’ (Ahsan, 1988, p.11) arguing that: ‘The syllabus is of paramount importance. It cannot be left in the hands of non-Muslims who are not intimately familiar with Islamic ethos and culture.’ (Ahsan, 1988, p. 13).

Zaki (1982) appears to be inconsistent, arguing on the one hand that the teaching of Islam in schools should be abolished, but at the same time arguing for Islamic studies to be given separate subject status in the curriculum. His main contention appears to be that Islam is generally taught badly, that resources on Islam are often inaccurate, and that some areas of Islam have been overlooked in the Curriculum. Hunt (1983), whilst accepting that not all areas of Islam are covered adequately in the curriculum, does not believe that this leads to a caricature of Islam. The same, he suggests, could be said of almost every subject in the curriculum, but education, ‘is mainly about opening doors, generating interest, establishing basic concepts.’ (Hunt, 1983, p. 98)

2.5 ‘Curriculum Religious Education’ and ‘Curriculum Islam’

Having considered the issues in the literature relating to what constitutes a ‘religion’, and the question as to whether Islam should be taught as part of the Religious Education syllabus, the literature review will now reflect upon what happens to Islam when it is
constructed for educational purposes, and whether there is a suggestion in the literature that this construction is a fair representation of ‘Islam’ or if it is misrepresented.

As stated in Chapter 1 Wright (1993) argues that the 1988 Education Act, whilst giving Religious Education a unique position as part of the basic curriculum, nonetheless created an ambiguity because, unlike other core subjects it was not dependent on nationally-agreed targets or syllabuses. Wright contends that this allowed Religious Education to follow one of two paths. Either it would follow the ‘narrow winding lane’, which is the option of greater safety; or it would follow a path which would enable long-lasting fulfilment, but which is fraught with the possibility of creating confusion. Wright argues that Religious Educators have chosen to follow the ‘narrow winding lane’ where Religious Education is, ‘…pre-packaged, its rough edges shorn off and smoothed over, its contradictions and obscurities hidden away.’ (Wright, 1993: 11).

Hayward (2006) collected data from 33 agreed syllabuses from 1999-2003, representing forty five local education authorities. Her research concluded that in Religious Education religions are constructed in a particular way to suit the perceived needs of the curriculum. Although her research deals primarily with the teaching of Christianity she contends that questions about content and the ways in which all faiths are represented cannot be avoided.

Hayward argues that ‘Curriculum Christianity’ is constructed to create a consensual image of the faith, devoid of contradiction or conflict. In her analysis of the work of the *Faith Communities Working Group Reports* (SCAA, 1994), which was the outcome of members of six ‘faiths’ meeting to decide what they believed it was desirable to know, she concluded that:

The Christian working party represented an impressive range of Christian churches; yet its *consensual* picture of the Christian tradition is of matters on which Christians do not speak with one voice. (Hayward, 2006: 154).

Because of this, ‘difference and diversity are obscured and, arguably, both commonality
and vitality.’ (Hayward, 2006: 154). She argues that an image of the faith is constructed which is devoid of difference or disagreement. Religious Education, she claims, implicitly assumes an apologetic role for religions. Christianity, and by extension religion in general, is rendered in such a way as to avoid controversy, and to take no account of the variety of contexts in which they have been constructed:

Divorced from the contexts which shaped and shape them, from a world in which they are inevitably enmeshed and act, both for good and for ill, religions are rendered simply ‘safe’, a ‘good thing’. (Hayward, 2006: 154).

Hayward’s research was based upon an analysis of a number of syllabuses on the basis of her contention that ‘Syllabuses themselves shape the religions they present.’ (Hayward, 2006: 155). She argues that the categorisation of religion in agreed syllabuses raises a number of issues:

Firstly there is the issue of diversity and commonality. Religious traditions are constructed in such a way that they are ‘…all forced into one mould; diversity within and across traditions is obscured, as are genuine commonalities.’ (Hayward, 2006: 158).

Secondly, the way in which religions are categorised and in which content is organised present religions as a static entity obscuring ‘fluidity, movement and interconnectedness.’ (Hayward, 2006: 158). Religions are presented as ‘closed systems’ with an ‘inner logic’ which is not necessarily theirs, and whilst it is accepted that religions may affect and even shape the world, this is often presented as a one-way process which takes no account of culture, or social and political contexts: ‘Religions are presented too often as out of time and place, abstractions.’ (Hayward, 2006: 158).

Hayward argues that syllabuses often suggest specific areas of study whilst neglecting others. Furthermore, students are rarely encouraged to engage with primary sources. She comments on the, ‘…absence of any references to the kinds of sources - as opposed to resources - which teachers may be expected to employ and with which students may
The lack of employment of primary sources is highlighted by Kay and Linnet Smith (2002) in their research of year 9 pupils in 22 co-educational comprehensive schools. They conclude that in their sample over a quarter (28.1%) of pupils had never used a bible in class and 70.7% had never visited a non-Christian place of worship. Furthermore, their research revealed that in their sample the most common activity was using a textbook, work sheet or reference book: ‘Pupils gets their heads down and read or work from prepared instructional material. In this sense RE is primarily a text-based activity from the pupil point of view.’ (Kay and Linnet Smith, 2002: 118). Although the research suggested that there were some good examples of ‘adventurousness’, over half of the pupils (55.5%) often copied notes from the blackboard, and more than one third (36.6%) often took notes dictated by the teacher. They argue that only very rarely were there attempts to engage pupils in discussion with members of faith communities. Religions, they argued, were presented in a way which was devoid of context, location and time.

Hayward (2006) concludes that most of the syllabuses in her study were content-heavy and were over-laden with respect to one tradition. She concludes that ‘Curriculum Christianity’ presents a ‘tidy orthodoxy’ which fails to convey the dynamic of the faith and which obscures its diversity. In addition it fails ‘…to cut through to the experiences and circumstances of culture, time and place which give voice to formulations of belief and “doctrine” and to do justice to the varied resonances they may have for diverse Christian communities in the present.’ (Hayward, 2006: 158).

2.6 Pedagogy

Chapter 1 reviewed the various approaches that have been applied to the teaching of Religious Education since 1944. A review of the literature suggested that in spite of a variety of innovative methods, the phenomenological approach remains dominant. Hayward’s extensive review of syllabuses concluded that the way in which categories were used in defining religions had its roots in the phenomenological approach, and that
a number of syllabuses employed, ‘what may loosely be termed “phenomenological categories” to map out religion(s).’ (Hayward, 2006: 157). Among many there appeared to be a concern with the way in which this approach might lead to a distorted construction of religions, not least when it led to a thematic study. Jackson (1997), in particular, is critical of the tendency for phenomenology to engender a thematic approach which, he claims, can lead to confusion, a point also made by Zaki (1982). Jackson, however, points out that whilst a thematic study of religion might be a common tool applied by phenomenologists, it is not universally applied. He also argues that many of the criticisms of the phenomenological approach are based upon misunderstanding. Smart himself recognised, claims Jackson, the need to understand the numinous, hence his ‘experiential dimension’. Jackson also points to the Schools Working Party 36 (London, 1971: 22) which emphasises the importance of understanding the connections between external features and the personal experience of adherents.

Whilst critical of the way in which the phenomenological approach has been applied Jackson also espouses its merits. He argues that it has given us a better understanding of other world-views. It is an approach which recognises the need for empathy, and the importance of insider testimony. At the same time he points to the limitations of classical phenomenology and points towards what he calls ‘new style phenomenology’. Classical phenomenology, he argues, has a tendency to concentrate on the external and observable with little emphasis on the motivation of religious adherents. It is an approach which is also often removed from the experience of pupils and which often displays a lack of concern for issues of ‘truth’.

‘New style phenomenology’, on the other hand, answers these criticisms. Here the role of the researcher goes beyond empathy, and reconstructs the religious world of the insider to become similar to an actor playing a role. In this method, he argues, there is need for scholarship (in order to understand the milieu of the ‘insider’) and the imagination (which enables empathy). Indeed Jackson argues for a whole range of approaches to the study of religion, ranging from new style phenomenology to anthropology and interpretation. He commends the Warwick RE Project, which seeks to do just this, and in so doing, claims Jackson, answers many of the criticisms levelled at
the phenomenological approach. Jackson argues that Smart himself rejected the idea that the phenomenological method was to be used to the exclusion of others, rather it was to be complemented by other techniques. Likewise Burke (1996) suggests that a variety of techniques need to be employed in Religious Education. In reflecting specifically on Islam, Burke suggests the use of field trips, interviews, active participation with Muslim communities, as well as understanding the textual resources of Islam: ‘In addition, it means understanding how Muslims themselves define Islam, namely what is recognisable to them as part of their faith’ (Burke 1996: 57).

Whilst accepting that the phenomenological approach need not necessarily lead to a thematic study of religions, Kay and Linnet Smith (2000) argue that that Smart’s classification of religions into seven dimensions means that, ‘the phenomenological approach and thematic teaching tend to coalesce’ (Kay and Linnet Smith, Spring 2000: 83), not least because the dimensions could be used as ‘themes’, whilst Hull (1991) describes that which results from the thematic approach as ‘mishmash’: ‘So much time is being devoted to a mishmash of comparative religions … our children are learning a mishmash of Nativity, Eid, Diwali and the Golden Horse.’ (Hull, 1991: 11) Nonetheless Hull contends that a thematic approach to the study of religion can be a useful method where material can be, ‘arranged around common fundamental human questions or might be concerned to explore overlapping ideas or values from different groups or traditions.’ (Hull, 1991: 12). Hull also claims that on straightforward educational grounds there is no reason why the thematic approach should be any more confusing than presenting religions side by side (Hull, 1998: 41), a point on which Hunt (1983) is in agreement.

Some educationalists argue that the phenomenological approach, particularly when applied thematically, could lead to a construction of religions which trivialised a faith and ignored competing truth claims. Burn and Hart (1988) argue that the phenomenological approach leads to the trivialisation of all faiths and denies the opportunity of examining contrary truth claims. More recently Philip Barnes has written extensively on competing issues of truth. Barnes (2001) contends that the phenomenological approach should be abandoned because it is based upon an outdated
and questionable philosophy of mind and language. He argues that some of the central assumptions of the approach, not least the implication that the essence of religion is experience of the sacred; that religious experience is different in quality from all other kinds of experience; and therefore the experiential dimension is central to religion and provides justification for the other dimensions, need to be seriously called into question:

That there is such a thing as the essence of religion, that this essence is to be found in religious experience, and more controversially still, that there is a basic distinction or dichotomy between religious experience and religious language. All these are currently in dispute. (Barnes, 2001: 453).

Not least, he argues, in reflecting upon Wittgenstein’s later philosophical ideas - which suggested that our feelings and emotions are dependent upon our gaining of language and our understanding of concepts – Barnes contends that emotions and feelings, including religious feelings, are structured and conditioned according to conceptual beliefs.

Barnes (2006) argues that the assumption that pupils can suspend their own beliefs and enter into the inner life of “the other” (as Schools Working Paper 36 had suggested) cannot be sustained when one considers psychological studies which have proven that children, particularly at the level of primary education, are conceptually unable to do so.

The emphasis on ‘experience’ which, Barnes claims, ‘translates into classroom practice in attempts to intuit the essence or depth of religion’ and in which the ‘essential reality of religious experience’ (Barnes, 2001: 454-455) takes centre stage, and assumes that the essence of all religions is the same: the quest for that moment of encounter with the sacred, ignores rival claims to religious truth. For this reason Barnes is highly critical of the spiritual or experiential approach to Religious Education associated with John Hammond et al. Barnes argues that in using these methodologies, ‘one of the most controversial issues in relation to religion is side-stepped: that of assessing religious claims to truth and adjudicating between rival (conceptual) claims to religious truth.’ (Barnes, 2001: 455).

Barnes contends that the phenomenological approach, whilst claiming to advance
toleration and respect for difference, actually does neither. It is, he suggests, an approach which leaves children conceptually ill equipped to respect difference. Indeed, by suggesting that all religions are complimentary not only contradicts the self-understanding of most adherents of religion and the doctrinal claims of religion,

... it also presents to pupils a picture of religion that is often contradicted by their experience elsewhere - in the home, where religious commitment is regarded as exclusive, and in the media, where attention is given to religious conflict and the contrary claims of different religions (Barnes, 2006: 404).

The phenomenological approach, Barnes argues, leads to a misrepresentation of religion in which religions are constructed so as not to cause offence. What is offered is, ‘a particular vision of what religion should be (as reconstructed by liberal theological interpretations), not what it is’ (Barnes, 2006: 406). And so the Qur’an cannot be regarded as the actual word of Allah, since in it other religions are condemned, and Jesus cannot be regarded as God incarnate, since this would suggest superiority over other religious traditions. The phenomenological approach, claims Barnes, shies away from that which is potentially controversial or challenging. This same point is also made by Ofsted (2007):

The changing and controversial role of religion in contemporary society is not given sufficient attention in most agreed syllabuses and examination courses (Ofsted, 2007, p. 27).

Barnes and Wright (2006) argue for a Religious Education which addresses rival truth claims, where difference is recognised, and in which there is an opportunity for analysis and criticism: a Religious Education which is, ‘critical, inclusive, relevant and progressive’ (Barnes and Wright, 2006: 66). Watson (1987) also points to issues of truth often being avoided in Religious Education (146). Hayward (2006), although writing specifically in relation to the teaching of Christianity, implies that all religions should be subject to, ‘informed critical reflection’ (Hayward, 2006: 153). Likewise, Ofsted (2007) argues that a critical approach to Religious Education should be a priority:
RE cannot ignore controversy. We should dispense with the notion that we should encourage pupils to think uncritically as a ‘good thing’. Religion is complex and its impact is ambiguous. Pupils are aware of this ambiguity and must be given the opportunity to explore the issues openly (Ofsted, 2007: 40).

Kay and Linnet Smith (2000) also point to another concern with teaching world religions, particularly when taught thematically. Their research project based upon the responses of 2,879 year 9 pupils in 22 schools in the maintained sector in England and Wales in three different local education authorities, concluded that a world religions approach could lead to confusion and misunderstanding for pupils when more than one religion was studied. They gave pupils detailed questionnaires in which they were given a number of religious terms to connect with a particular religion. They conclude that:

The mistakes made by pupils were compared with the number of religions they had studied and the evidence showed that pupils who had studied five or more religions were more likely to make mistakes than pupils who had studied between two and four religions (Kay and Linnet Smith, Spring 2000: 81)

They also found that the largest percentage of pupils in the sample (38.7%) had studied six world religions.

Kay and Linnet Smith’s research also suggests that confusion amongst pupils is more likely to occur when there is mixed methods approach to the teaching of Religious Education. They concluded that there appears to be no significant difference in terms of pupil confusion between a thematic approach and a systematic approach, indeed they judged that their research,

... clearly showed that a systematic approach to teaching religions is likely to result in more favourable attitudes to the religion than a thematic approach or an approach that combines thematic and systematic elements. (Kay and Linnet-Smith, Summer, 2000: 186).

Likewise Barnes (2006) argues that the thematic teaching of Religious Education is flawed and can only lead to a lack of pupil interest and even confusion.
2.7 Language, literacy and literature

The literature suggested a number of concerns relating to language, literacy and literature and its effect on the construction of Islam. Zaki (1982) is critical of the literature available to teachers and students of Islam. He argues that textbooks on Islam are generally written by non-Muslims, and contain many inaccuracies. Tames (1986) suggests that teachers need to be familiar with works about Islam written by Muslims so as to give a fair and balanced view of the Islamic faith, one which is free from any inaccuracy or misunderstanding. Tames also argues that Religious Education teachers should be familiar with first-hand accounts of the Muslim world from non-Muslim writers, so that they can appreciate what things are like on the inside as well as outside the Muslim world.

Jackson (1997) concedes that some Religious Education textbooks, particularly those which adopt a thematic approach, attempt to cover too much material, leading to the possibility of confusion, oversimplification, and superficial treatment.

Homan (2004), in an article exploring the National Literacy Strategy for Key Stage 3, makes a number of observations related to language and religious literacy. Homan draws a distinction between ‘codification’ of words (where words are grouped into particular classes and given a prescriptive definition), and the ‘decodification’ of words (a more active process which involves ‘open access to contexts’ ‘extended dialogue’ and ‘expansive definition’) (Homan, 2004). He argues for the second approach, suggesting it allows for more fluid and broad definitions of words, where words are explored rather than defined. Homan suggests that this is particularly important in Religious Education where words have different shades of meaning. Teachers and pupils alike should, he argues, look beyond the labelling and classification of words. Homan is therefore critical of the use of word banks, both in the classroom and in textbooks. He is similarly critical of techniques such as word searches, word bingo, crosswords and such like. Homan is concerned as to who ‘decides’ on a correct definition of a word. He also wonders whether such activities allow for expansive definitions of words. He expresses concern
at the way in which Religious Education textbooks often contain a glossary of terms, introducing simple one-word definitions which are often inadequate and shy away from the controversial. The glossary approach, he argues, can only give a simplistic, even erroneous definition to complex words. A particular definition of a word, suggests Homan, can be adopted so as not to cause offence.

Tames (1986) argues that teachers should become familiar with the primary texts of Islam. Homan (2004) goes further. He is critical of the way in which education is often removed from practical experience. In Religious Education, he argues, learning is often at second or third hand, working from textbooks or worksheets; secondary sources rather than primary texts, a point that has already been noted from the research of Kay and Linnet-Smith (2002) and Hayward (2006). Homan (2004) argues that it is the sacred text which offers an experience which is both aesthetic and didactic. Pupils, he suggests, should be encouraged to be ‘healthy sceptics’ and discover using a whole range of sources and resources, including educational visits, contact with faith communities, engaging with primary texts, and exploring dialogue with faith communities.

2.8 The Warwick Report

As this thesis was being written up the Warwick Religious and Education Unit at the University of Warwick published its report, Materials used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England. Some of the findings of their research are pertinent to this project and will be reflected upon in the conclusion.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY
3.1 The choice of a qualitative paradigm

The research project seeks to investigate the research questions detailed in Chapter 1 in the context of the teaching of Islam in Religious Education at Key Stages 3 and 4. The research setting, therefore, is a sample of English secondary schools, and the participants are Religious Education teachers within that sample.

In seeking to understand the way in which Islam is constructed in the secondary school setting the researcher was concerned with the delivery of curriculum objectives, beginning with the development and choice of syllabi through to the production of schemes of work, lesson plans, ending with lesson presentation. In this context the research sought to comprehend the motivations behind the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4, the feelings and perceptions of teachers, the milieu in which they live and work, the dominant teaching methods adopted by them, and the outside factors which might have a bearing on construction, such as government dictates and public examinations. In so doing the researcher sought to interpret and understand the socially constructed nature of reality in this context and how social experiences are created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Initially the researcher considered whether an ethnographic study should be undertaken, but this approach would have involved being totally immersed in the research settings and in the activities of participants (Gilbert, 2004), and this was not the case. The researcher concluded that the nature of this investigation led to the formation of the proposed research project in terms of a qualitative approach, using a multi-method approach which is characteristic of qualitative research (Flick, 1998). The four classic methods of qualitative data collection were adopted: interviews; observations; documents; and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2003 et al.). To attain as in-depth an understanding as possible of the phenomenon under investigation teachers of Religious Education were interviewed; lessons in which Islam was being taught were observed, written documentation relating to the teaching of Islam, including syllabuses, schemes of work and lesson plans, were subjected to content
analysis, along with written and audiovisual teaching resources. The purpose of this triangulated approach was two-fold. First, from the perspective of validity, I wanted to consider the research questions from different perspectives in order to gain a more complete picture. Secondly, in respect of *complementarity* (Greene, *et al.*, 1989), I wanted to reveal the complexity of the social world I was investigating by exploring the diverse factors which might lead to the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4. As is often the case with qualitative research, analysis did not take place *after* the data was collected but was a *continuous* process. Indeed one could describe the method as recursive, with the literature review leading to research questions, leading to data collection, leading to a redefinition of the research questions, leading to analysis, leading to a further trawl of the literature, and so on (Bryman, 2004).

### 3.2 Methods

#### 3.22 Interviews

**Rationale**

The overriding purpose of the research was to discover what happens to Islam when it is constructed for educational purposes, particularly in the light of the community cohesion agenda. Crucial to an understanding of this were the perceptions, philosophies and fears of teachers, the professionals who are tasked with transmitting an understanding of Islam in the classroom. Interviews with Religious Education teachers were considered the most effective way to enable the researcher to comprehend something of the environment in which Islam is taught, the challenges and constraints teachers face, from both within the school community and outside of that community. In so doing the researcher was seeking to have some understanding of the issues teachers are faced with when teaching Islam, and the motivations behind the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4.

The benefit of the interview is that it can be elaborative, data rich, and flexible (Fontana & Frey, 1994: 365). It can also be stimulating for respondents, providing the potential
for greater depth, allowing the researcher to ask probing questions which allow for the responses of participants to be developed in a way that might not be possible with other methods, for example the use of a questionnaire.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Having given consideration to the method of interviewing which would be of most value to the research project, the semi-structured interview was deemed to be the most apposite. A structured interview, whilst helping to limit the possibility of researcher influence by ensuring that the same questions are asked of each participant, leading to results that might be deemed ‘neutral’ (Kvale, 1996) would leave little room for the respondent to open up and offer opinions, feelings and thoughts. A structured interview, therefore, might not yield the expansive data that was sought in order to understand what is happening in the research setting (Lofland, 1971: 76). An unstructured interview, on the other hand, whilst appealing in that it would allow the participants complete freedom to discuss issues of particular concern and would doubtless yield rich expansive data, might not remain focused enough on the issues pertinent to the research project. An unstructured interview would also incur a greater risk of potential researcher bias, with the possibility for open and potentially indirect responses being freely interpreted by the researcher (Cresswell, 2003). The benefit of the *semi-structured* interview is that it allows for questions to be generally specified on an interview *guide*, but both interviewer and participant have greater freedom to probe and expand. In this context the interview is more of a dialogue, but within the parameters of the interview guide (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). This method has the benefit of allowing participants to answer questions on their own terms, whilst allowing the researcher the possibility of keeping the interview relatively tightly structured. For these reasons, in reflecting on my research questions and the various possibilities for research technique, I considered semi-structured interviews to be the most suitable.

**The Application**

Kvale (1996) provides a useful analysis of the interview process on which to reflect when preparing for and conducting interviews, along with subsequent data analysis. He suggests that there are seven stages which one should consider: thematizing; designing;
interviewing; transcribing; analyzing; verifying; and reporting.

The thematizing stage concerns the why and what of the investigation, broadly speaking the development of the research questions. This needs to be clarified, argues Kvale, before the how, by which he means the method, is determined. The choice of semi structured interviews, observations, and content analysis in this study resulted from a reflection on the why and what of the research project, as described above.

Kvale’s designing stages concerns the preparation of the interview guide. This involved translating the projects’ objectives into the questions which will form the interview guide (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 274). When undertaking this I had in mind Kvale’s assertion that when planning the interview guide one should take into consideration all seven stages of the interview process to ensure that the project is focused from the outset and that the questions were framed with the research objectives always in mind. At the same time, however, the interview guide was designed to ask more general questions at the beginning, so as to break the ice and help create a more relaxed and comfortable environment for the participant, before moving on to more specific questions.

In preparing the interview guide and in undertaking the interviews themselves two principles were in mind: First, that the questioning should be as open ended as possible, allowing responses to be spontaneous. Second, the interview itself needed to be conducted in such a way as to elicit expansive answers (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). The interview guide emerged over a period of time and was a process which began with three small scale research projects on the construction of Islam which were undertaken at stage one of the EdD. The guide, therefore, developed as the researcher reflected upon those things which were interesting or problematic with the research topic, what Lofland (1995) refers to as ‘puzzlements’. The use of open-ended questions helped to ensure that the process was as objective as possible and that teachers did not feel forced into answering questions in a way that might have deliberately elicited desired response. The intention was to allow participants to answer as fully and honestly as they could, and to help guard against interviewer bias. A copy of the interview guide is located in appendix 1.
It was hoped that the sample of those interviewed would represent a diversity of experience, obtaining the view of those recently qualified and those who were experienced teachers, along with a diversity of backgrounds, so as to ensure a variety of opinion. At each of the sample schools at least three teachers were interviewed or observed. However, the choice of teachers to be interviewed was largely determined by which teachers were willing or able to take part. No teacher openly refused, although some felt unable because of time constraints. Nonetheless, the desired diversity of experience and background within the sample was achieved. Eighteen teachers were interviewed in total. The following diagram provides information on each numbered teacher at each school, their experience, whether they are head of department, and whether they are Religious Education specialists:
### Table 3.1: Characteristics of teachers in the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Over 5 years experience</th>
<th>Under 5 years experience</th>
<th>Head of Department</th>
<th>Religious Education Specialist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teachers came from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Of the eighteen teachers interviewed only seven openly disclosed a religious affiliation, six of whom taught in the two faith schools in the sample. Of these three were practising Anglicans, three were Roman Catholics, and one was from a Greek Orthodox tradition. Additionally, one of the teachers interviewed was from a Muslim background, and one from a Hindu background, although neither continued to practise their faith.

Interviews were conducted at a time convenient to participants. The location of the interview was dependent upon available space. Of the eighteen interviews, three took place in the departmental office; three in the staff room; ten in a classroom; and a further two in what amounted to a converted cleaning cupboard. The interviewer attempted to make the participant at ease, assuming a relaxed and calm manner, and informing the participant that he was genuinely interested in hearing their reflections on the teaching of Islam. The semi-structured nature of the interviews helped to ensure that they were like a guided conversation, allowing the participant to speak freely, whilst remaining broadly focused on the research questions (Lofland, 1995). The role of the interviewer was to facilitate the conversation rather than to contribute at length, and thereby contaminate the reflections of the participant. The use of probing as a technique helped to elicit a more detailed answer, particularly when ambiguous responses were given. This often involved repeating or rephrasing questions. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording machine, and were later copied on to a computer. At the beginning of each interview the participant was asked if they were happy for the interview to be recorded. They were also assured of anonymity, that they could withdraw at any time, and that the recorder would be switched off at any point should they wish, or if there were specific comments that they did not want to be recorded. In the event all participants were happy for the interview to be recorded in full. Before each interview was conducted participants were assigned a number and brief notes were made relating to them, for example if they were head of department, or a newly qualified teacher. After interview any further pertinent points that might have emerged were noted, along with comments about the setting of the interview and other relevant information.

All interviews were listened to at least three times to ensure accuracy in transcription.
Having initially completely transcribed the first interviews, it soon became evident that broad themes were emerging. At this point headed sheets were prepared according to theme, and comments pertaining to those themes were transcribed onto corresponding sheets, with the teacher and school identified by number. Subsequent interviews were not transcribed in their entirety; rather those comments which were pertinent to the research questions were transcribed onto the headed sheets. This ensured that analysis was focused, and that irrelevant material was not unnecessarily transcribed. Given the often conversational nature of the interviews this process was both necessary and appropriate. This also ensured that the material was clearly organized when data analysis took place. An example of the headed data sheets is given in appendix 2.

3.23 Classroom Observation

Rationale

Whereas the interviews were conducted to examine teacher’s perceptions concerning the teaching of Islam, observations were intended to scrutinize events and actions as they happened (Marshall and Rossman 1995:79). It was intended that the observation could be used either to confirm or challenge what might be said at interview, or (where observation preceded interview) to give rise to further questions that could be posed. The objective was that interviews and observations would be more data rich. It has been noted that observation is not only one of the earliest and most basic forms of research, it is also the most likely technique to be used in conjunction with other methods, such as interviewing (Adler and Adler 1994:377). By observing what was actually happening in the classroom setting the researcher was able to deepen an understanding of the world of the participants and gain insight into their social reality.

In reflecting upon what might be the most apposite approach to adopt, the four classic methods of observation were considered: Three methods (complete participant, observer as participant, and participant as observer) were rejected on the grounds that the purpose of my observation was to see the teacher in his or her ‘natural setting’, none of which would have been possible with the three methods noted above, in which the researcher is
to varying degrees involved in the activity, thus contaminating the ‘natural setting’. The fourth classic method, that as complete observer, was considered the most appropriate approach, in which the observer does not participate at all but is an unobtrusive observer. The rationale for this was determined by the primary aim behind the use of observation as a research tool, namely to observe the teaching of Islam in its natural setting. For the researcher to participate in any way might dramatically affect the behaviour of both teacher and pupils and, whilst it is never possible to eliminate the potential of observer effect, it was intended that assuming the role of complete observer might limit this.

As with the interviews it was necessary that the research questions were the central focus throughout the process of classroom observation. From these emerged a schedule which helped to ensure that the observation was firmly focused around the research questions. A copy of the observation schedule is located in appendix 3.

**The Application**

Across the six schools in the sample eleven lessons were observed (2 at schools 1; 3; 4; 5 and 3 at school 2). Only at school six were no lessons observed, due to the fact that Islam was not going to be taught again until the year following data collection. However, at this school all of the teachers used the same generic PowerPoint presentations when teaching Islam, and these were subjected to content analysis. It was not possible to observe all of the teachers who had been interviewed, in most cases because they happened not to be teaching Islam in the year in which data collection was taking place. No-one refused to be observed for any other reason. Observations took place at times negotiated with the head of department at each school, and were dependent on timetables. Seven of the observations were of Key Stage 3 lessons, and four were of Key Stage 4 lessons. This was a fair representation of the sample, given that Islam is only taught at Key Stage 4 at two of the schools in the sample. In the course of observations comments were made by the researcher on the observation schedule in preparation for later analysis. Once again this helped to ensure that the material was both organized and focused on the research questions. At the analysis stage completed
observation schedules were subjected to content analysis in the same way as the materials detailed below.

3.24 Content Analysis

Content analysis can be defined as a method by which textual, recorded or visual materials are systematically analyzed in order to produce data (Gilbert, 2008). A sample of materials is selected and subjected to coding dependent upon defined categories or themes, which are themselves derived from the research questions. Initially associated with quantitative research in the nineteenth century, qualitative content analysis approaches were later influenced by the writings of Weber (1907), Blumer (1933), and Levi-Strauss (1968). Walizer and Weiner (1978) attempted to define content analysis as a systematic procedure which sought to examine the content of recorded information. Qualitative data analysis involves far more than collecting data and systematically ordering it, as with any qualitative research there is a degree of evaluation and interpretation, involving a degree of subjectivity.

Rationale

In order to gain as full an understanding as possible of the process of the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4, materials associated with the teaching of Islam were subjected to content analysis. This included a sample of syllabuses, schemes of work, lesson plans, text books, work sheets and audio visual teaching materials.

Brenner et al (1985) set out a number of steps which they suggest need to be undertaken when conducting a content analysis so as help ensure that the findings are reliable and replicable.

First, they suggest ‘Briefing’. By this they mean fully understanding the problem and its context. Secondly, ‘Sampling’; ensuring that a fair and reasonable sample is selected for analysis so as to enable a true picture to emerge from which quantifiable findings can be gleaned. Thirdly, they suggest associating the content analysis with other work on the
subject which has already been undertaken. This should be followed by ‘hypothesis development’, ‘hypothesis testing’ and ‘immersion in the data’ that is to be collected. ‘Categorizing’ involves the coding of the content to be analyzed. Brenner et al. (1985) had argued that the categories and labels assigned to the content must reflect the purpose of the research. In other words the ‘codes’ should relate to the research questions. ‘Incubation’ should follow, meaning reflecting upon the data that has been collected and developing ideas, judgments and interpretations. This should be followed by ‘synthesis’, rationalization of the coding used and identifying the themes and patterns that are emerging. ‘Culling’, which involves rethinking the coding system, removing any codes which have not proved fruitful, and reinterpreting data so that it is manageable in order for it to be written up. This, they suggest, should be followed by ‘interpretation’, ‘writing’ and ‘rethinking’.

The Application

The analysis of Brenner et al. (1985) was invaluable in thinking through the process involved in content analysis. Having reflected upon the issues raised by the literature in relation to the research topic, and upon the research questions that had been developed the researcher was able to begin the process of ‘categorizing’. This involved subjecting the selected sample to a process of ‘coding’.

Coding was necessary in order to break the material down into manageable ‘chunks’ in order to guard against data overload and to assist the process of data retrieval (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). When coding care was taken to guard against the temptation to convert words into number codes on the premise that numbers are less ambiguous than words (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). Rather, codes were appointed which reflected the research questions and were more intelligible than numbers might have been.

Codes can be described as tags or labels given to chunks of varying sizes of material to be analyzed (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). These might be sentences, phrases, paragraphs or even single words, and may be in the form of written language or some other medium, such as the spoken word of audio visual material. The ‘code’ or ‘label’
assigns a unit of meaning to a unit of material being analyzed. For this reason coding is invaluable when one is faced with a huge amount of data to analyze; data which may come from a numbers of sources, both written and spoken.

The researcher reflected upon the variety of methods which could have been applied when creating codes, many of which appeared to be useful when dealing with research in the field (for example, the methods proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Lofland (1971)), when one is concerned with actions, activities, meanings, participation of individuals and the relationships between individuals and settings, but these appeared less applicable when coding a series of documents, rather than notes which have been generated from field research.

In creating codes for this study the researcher has followed the methodology suggested by Miles and Hubermann (1994). The rationale behind this is that this appears to be a more appropriate method for coding the kind of written and audio visual materials in question. The method entails creating a start list of codes which are based upon the research problem, and relate directly to the research questions. These questions gave rise to the following list of codes:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master Code</th>
<th>Descriptive Label</th>
<th>Sub-Code</th>
<th>Relates to Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Whose construction?</td>
<td>CI-WC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Western/Christian world view?</td>
<td>CI-WV</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>CI-DIS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>One religion among many?</td>
<td>CI-ORAM</td>
<td>1; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Engagement of the faith community?</td>
<td>CI-FC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOM</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>HOM-DIV</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOM</td>
<td>Devoid of contradiction</td>
<td>HOM-CON</td>
<td>2; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOM</td>
<td>Consensual</td>
<td>HOM-CONS</td>
<td>2; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOM</td>
<td>Dominant tradition</td>
<td>HOM-TRAD</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOM</td>
<td>Static/dynamic</td>
<td>HOM-DYN</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Phenomenological</td>
<td>PED-PH</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>PED-TH</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>PED-EXP</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Knowledge and Understanding</td>
<td>PED-KU</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Removed from experience</td>
<td>PED-REM</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>PED-EXP</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Superficiality/oversimplified</td>
<td>PED-SUP</td>
<td>4;2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Word Spelling</td>
<td>LA-WS</td>
<td>1; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Word definition</td>
<td>LA-WD</td>
<td>1; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Word Banks</td>
<td>LA-WB</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Definition/description of concepts</td>
<td>LA-DEF</td>
<td>1; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Word understanding/passive or active</td>
<td>LA-WU</td>
<td>1; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Use of primary sources</td>
<td>LA-PS</td>
<td>1; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Negative stereotyping</td>
<td>ST-NS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Western view of Islam</td>
<td>ST-WV</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Overcompensating</td>
<td>ST-OC</td>
<td>2; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>PR for Islam</td>
<td>ST-PR</td>
<td>2; 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Coding Schedule
These are ‘descriptive codes’, labels which require little or no interpretation since they attribute a class of phenomena to a segment of communication (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). Furthermore, since in the current study the coding of data was to be undertaken by hand and not by computer software, it was necessary for the codes to be easily held on to in the memory, and therefore to be meaningful. With this in mind each code was given a name closest to the concept that it is describing and letters which derive from it.

Each Master Code and Sub Code were used to mark off segments of data relating to the research questions. This method produced a coding system that was well structured, with codes that were easy to memorize and to use. The tight structure also led to an analysis which was both systematic, in that the same system was applied to each document to be analyzed; and objective, ensuring that there was no bias.

The list of codes above includes a descriptive label for each code which served as an aide memoir during the process of coding. This was important in respect of consistency, leading to a study that was systematic, objective and quantifiable. Whilst the researcher recognizes that there will always be a degree of subjectivity in qualitative research, the method and structure outlined above was intended to help achieve similar results if the data were coded by another hand.

The actual process of coding involved breaking down the material, whether written or spoken/visual, into units of content. Codes were given to words (the smallest possible unit of content), sentences, chunks of sentences, paragraphs, chapters or entire texts (Krippendorff, 1980). Codes were written in the left hand margin of the texts to be analyzed with the right hand margin reserved for marginal remarks. This raised a potential problem, particularly since the researcher was coding by hand. Initially the margins of a document might become ‘clogged up’ with codes, making analysis itself more complex. In time, however, the researcher became aware that that not all data needed to be coded, only that which is pertinent to the research questions.
The marginal remarks related to any ideas, feelings and reactions which emerged during the process of coding and which a simple code could not encompass. These marginal remarks were useful in that they helped in the interpretation of data, in suggesting potential new codes, and in the process of analysis.

Miles and Hubermann (1994) suggest a second level of coding which they call ‘pattern coding’. In a sense this is the process of ‘synthesis’ and ‘culling’ suggested by Brenner et al (1985). Pattern coding involves grouping the data into smaller units of analysis so as to enable one to draw conclusions from the data. They are meta-codes which enable the researcher to reduce data into more narrow or broader concepts which could then be analyzed more easily. However, the researcher found that the initial coding structure was already tight and robust. This enabled units of analysis to be grouped into small segments, making a separate process of pattern coding unnecessary. Nonetheless this method had informed the design of the initial coding schedule. In effect the material was first analyzed by coding the various documents using the major subsets (CI; HOM; PED; LA; ST). These were, essentially, the ‘meta-codes’. Subsequent analysis of the data then sought to refine the material using the chosen codes.

Once material was coded, with codes written in the left hand margin and marginal notes in the right hand margin, the next stage was to interpret the data. For this purpose a ‘coding pro forma’ was completed for each document. The pro forma was also invaluable when listening to and watching audio visual material. Examples of complete coding pro forma can be found in appendix 4.

To subject all documents, text books, audiovisual materials used for the purpose of teaching Islam in all six schools to content analysis would have been extremely time consuming. A sample was selected consisting of the major text books used for the teaching of Islam in the sample; along with a sample of audio visual material used across the schools; locally agreed syllabuses and examination syllabuses; schemes of work and a selection of lesson plans deriving from them. Details of these materials can be found in appendix 5. Whilst the sample is not universal it is both comprehensive and purposeful (Gilbert, 2008).
3.3 The Selection of the Sample

3.31 The Research Population

Because it would have been logistically impossible to research the construction of Islam in secondary schools throughout England, the research population consisted of secondary schools at which Islam was taught in Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 in the geographical area of the South of England.

3.32 The Research Sample

Given the potentially huge size of the research population sampling was necessary to determine a smaller ‘chunk’ from which the researcher might draw generalizations which could be applicable to the wider population (Miles and Hubermann, 1994).

Eleven schools were initially contacted with a view to forming the sample. These were chosen on the basis of school type and demographic factors. It soon became apparent that non-response would be a major issue. Only seven responded favourably, and two of those eventually declined. A further four schools were contacted and later, due to rejection and non-response, a further two, of which one responded favourably. Of those schools that responded but declined to participate the reason given was the lack of time. Three of those who declined expressed an interest in the project, but felt that they could not commit themselves for this reason. Six schools did not respond at all. Eventually, of the seventeen schools who were contacted, six schools emerged as being extremely interested in being involved in the project.

The sample was purposive rather than random, in which the researcher identified certain schools which were considered to be able to provide rich data pertinent to the phenomena the research was engaged in assessing (Kuzel, 1992). In this sense one could argue that the sample was in some measure opportunist (Burgess, 2007). A further consideration in selecting sample members related to variety in terms of
demography, faith and non-faith schools, and syllabuses adopted. The sample also included single sex schools and co-educational schools. Muslim schools were not included in the sample since the overriding consideration was to investigate how Islam was taught to non-Muslims. It was hoped that this variety would ensure that data would be robust and that it would be possible to make inferences about the population (Oliver, 2008). Details of the features of the schools in the sample can be found in appendix 6. This also details how Islam fits in to the Religious Education syllabus at each school.

The Size of the Sample

One could argue that six schools is a relatively small sample from which to draw generalizations which could be applied to the wider population. Notwithstanding that qualitative researchers generally work with small samples of people in depth, unlike quantitative researchers (Miles and Hubermann 1994), the issue is not one of numerical size but whether the in-depth study of a representative sample can yield data which can be applied to the research population (Oliver, 2008). Although the current sample might on the surface appear small, it is not a case of simply researching six schools, but up to four teachers in each school, a variety of different syllabuses, both locally agreed and those produced for national examinations (and therefore used by many schools). Additionally text books and other learning materials are not unique to the six schools in the sample. It could be argued, therefore, that whilst on one hand a sample of six schools is studied in depth, it must also be considered that there is maximum variation within the sample, allowing for diverse variations, whilst looking for common patterns. The researcher discovered, in the process of field research, that common patterns emerged very quickly, suggesting that the sample was large enough and that to increase it might have led to multiple instances of the same phenomena, which would have been time consuming and wasteful. The emergence of common themes from diverse settings gave confidence to the researcher that generalizations could be applied to the wider population, whilst acknowledging that, as with any interpretive research, there will always be a degree of subjectivity.

The research population, and therefore the sample, was limited to the South East of
England. The researcher recognises that a wider and more diverse population, and therefore sample, might yield different data. Nonetheless in the context of the population from which the sample was selected a wide variety of demographic and economic factors were represented, ranging from areas of economic deprivation to those of wealth and affluence. Whilst all of the pupils lived and studied in areas with little racial, religious or ethnic diversity, there were significant variations. The life experience of pupils in school 2 would differ significantly from those in school 6. Within the sample a number of different syllabuses were used in the teaching of Religious Studies, three locally agreed syllabuses, and two syllabuses adapted by faith schools. Whilst it is true that the locally agreed syllabus of any given region will, to some extent, reflect the ‘faith make-up’ of that region, and that those living in a predominantly Muslim locale might find an agreed syllabus with a greater weighting towards Islam, including schools in a predominantly Muslim area might not answer the questions with which this research is concerned. What the current study seeks to determine is how Islam is taught to pupils who might otherwise have little contact with the faith, and whether one can discern a difference between the construction of ‘educational Islam’ and Islam as it is perceived within the Islamic faith. The presence of varying numbers of Muslim pupils in the sample schools raised a number of fascinating issues in this respect. However, whilst it would be interesting to conduct similar research in a predominantly Muslim area in the North of England, for example, such a study would yield very different results, but would also be asking very different questions.

Whilst the sample reflects a variety in terms of demography, and of school type – whether coeducational or single sex, faith or non-denominational, it could be criticized on the grounds that each of the schools in the sample has links, however tenuous, with the University of Brighton. Generally speaking this consists of the schools being used, either currently or in the past, as placement schools for teacher training purposes. Indeed, of the eighteen teachers who participated thirteen had been trained at the University of Brighton. Whilst this is clearly a disadvantage it did present some clear advantages: First, the fact that there was an already existing relationship between school and university made initial contact easier. Secondly, and more importantly in the context of a purposive sample, it enabled to researcher to select schools which might potentially
provide interesting data on the research subject.

3.33 Access

In the first instance the Heads of Department at each of the potential sample schools was contacted by letter. Included with the letter was a participant information sheet, giving details of the nature of the research project (Appendix 7) and participant consent forms (Appendix 8). This clearly detailed what the participant was agreeing to and what the data would be used for. Following this Heads of Department who had expressed an interest were visited by the researcher for an informal meeting to discuss the research and any potential concerns. Heads of Department discussed the project with colleagues at staff meetings to determine who might be willing to participate. The researcher was not present at these meetings but offered to speak further with potential participants if this were deemed desirable. In the event this was not necessary.

Access was determined by a number of factors, not least when Islam was being taught. This created particular issues because often Islam was only taught during one term of the academic year. Further practical problems relating to access were encountered by a number of unforeseen circumstances such as teacher sickness, Jury Service, the sudden arrival of an Ofsted inspection team, and maternity leave. It was, therefore, necessary for both the researcher and the researched to be as flexible as possible.

Access to each school and for each interview or observation was made through the head of department of the respective school, in liaison with participant teachers. At each interview the nature of the research was reiterated. Each participant was invited to sign a consent form. At every visit the researcher was signed in and out of the school in accordance with its health and safety procedures.

3.34 What would I do differently?

As with all research one is forced to compromise as a result of circumstance, not least the limitation that time places on the research project. Ideally I would have liked to have
widened the population and therefore the sample so as to make it more geographically
diverse, to ascertain the extent to which geographical location might yield different data. The researcher would have liked to have conducted more interviews and observations, analyzed a larger number of syllabuses, text books, audio visual material and so forth, in a greater variety of schools. However, given the emergence of common themes in the diverse sample chosen, the researcher wonders whether a wider project would not conclude with the same findings, rendering such a project unnecessary and time consuming.

3.4 Ethical Issues

Introduction

In any research project one is aware that the researcher has a dual responsibility. First, a responsibility to the pursuit and advancement of truth and, secondly, a responsibility to the subjects of the research. It is commonly accepted that this latter aspect, which relates to the safety and integrity of the research subjects, must be of primary importance, even where it may hamper or limit the pursuit of truth (Denzin, 2000)

3.41 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the safety and integrity of the participants involved in the research project, and indeed the participating institutions, consideration needed to be given to the following ethical issues:

- Informed Consent
- Respect for Privacy
- Safeguarding the confidentiality of the data
- Harm to participants and researchers
- Deceit and lying
- Benefit to those taking part, to me and to the field.

In order to ensure that due care was taken in respect of these the following were adhered
3.43 Informed Consent

Initial contact was made with the Head of Religious Education at each of the schools in the sample. This consisted of a covering letter, copies of participant information sheets which detailed the nature of the research (Appendix 7) and participant consent forms (Appendix 8). The Head of Religious Education at each school was, therefore, the gatekeeper (Gilbert, 2008). From the perspective of informed consent the researcher was concerned that participants in the research project did not feel compelled to participate by the gatekeeper, as head of department (Homan, 2002). Additionally, the researcher was mindful of the possibility of the perception on the part of teachers of a hierarchy between university and school. In striving to eliminate these factors the following process was adopted:

Once interest had been expressed a pre-visit was arranged. The researcher met with heads of departments and those teaching staff who had expressed interest. The purpose of this visit was three fold: first, to begin building up a relationship of trust between researcher and school, in an effort to alleviate hierarchical perceptions. Second, to provide an opportunity for the research project to be expressed verbally, and for any questions to be answered. Third, to begin the process of arranging dates and times for interviews and observations.

When meeting participants for the first time the aims and objectives of the research project were once again explained, what it was they were consenting to, along with issues of confidentiality and data collection and storage. Participants were then invited to sign consent forms. It was hoped that this would ensure the consent of each individual was voluntary, which should be considered essential from an ethical perspective (Homan, 1991). The consent form made it clear that participants could withdraw at any time. Participants were also offered transcripts of interviews on request, along with the opportunity to discuss the results of the research project with the researcher. Participants were made aware that they would be given access to any data relating to them at any
time on request.

### 3.44 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The anonymity of the participants and of the institutions in which they work was absolutely crucial. Participants needed to be sure that they could comment freely without fear or favour and that neither they nor the school in which they taught could be identified. Whilst it is impossible to guarantee that a school could never be identified, measures were taken to ensure that any designation would be highly unlikely.

Nowhere in the final report are the names of schools given. Schools and teachers are identified by the designation of a number, and any reference to the name of school or teacher in taped recordings has not been reproduced in transcript or final report. Although descriptions of the type of school are portrayed, these are very general and could relate to a large number of schools with a similar demography, pupil population, and ethos. Syllabuses, text books and exam courses are scrutinized and subjected to content analysis, but these would be followed by a large number of schools. It would be equally difficult to identify a school through descriptions of schemes of work and lesson plans.

### 3.45 Storage of Data

Interviews were initially recorded on a portable digital voice recorder. After each interview the data was transferred to a computer. At this point all data on the portable voice recorder was deleted. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) all data on the computer was password protected, and the password known only to the researcher. All written data has been kept in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) the data will be retained only for as long as the material is needed for research purposes, or for a period of five years, whichever is the shortest.
3.46 Ethical issues specific to interviews

In terms of the interview process it has been noted that: ‘sensitive topics place particular emphasis on voluntariness in participation, being mentally prepared for the interview, the scope for self expression, confidentiality and the option to withhold information.’ (Gilbert, 2008: 157). With this in mind the researcher had met all participants at least once prior to the interview. In most cases a friendly relationship had been developed between researcher and participant ensuring a degree of trust. All participants were aware of the nature of the research, and that the interview was to be semi-structured, and that the primary importance was to hear their views and opinions. To ensure participant safety and confidence the researcher explained how the data was to be stored, that participant confidentiality would be ensured, and that they would not be expected to disclose anything which would cause distress or anxiety.

3.47 Ethical issues specific to observation

It could be argued that covert observation is a violation of the principle of informed consent since the participants of the observation are not made aware of their participation in the research (Gilbert, 2008). In one sense the observation that was being undertaken was ‘covert’ given that the researcher was sat anonymously at the back of the classroom, and the pupils were not made aware of his presence. However, the purpose of the research was not to observe pupils but teachers, from whom consent had been obtained.

3.48 Ethical issues specific to content analysis

Other than issues mentioned earlier no further ethical issues specifically related to the content analysis are envisaged. The materials which were subjected to scrutiny consisted of learning resources such as text books and audio visual material, along with syllabuses and examples of exam papers. These materials are all in the public domain. In addition, schemes of work, lesson plans and worksheets from each of the schools were critically
examined. However, since all materials were analysed in order to identify themes relating to construction, it would not be possible to identify specific schools from these. Materials were only subjected to content analysis with the permission of participating schools.

3.49 Ethical justification of research project

In reflecting upon the research project it was felt important to give due consideration to the justification of the project from the perspective of the benefit to the participants, the field of research and the professional practice of the researcher.

In respect of the field it is hoped that the research project would contribute to the debate concerning the nature and purpose of Religious Education in general, not least in the light of the community cohesion agenda. In particular it seeks to reflect upon particular issues and problems faced by practitioners in the teaching of Islam.

From the perspective of participants it became clear when discussing the project with Heads of Department and potential participants before data collection began that they were not only interested in contributing to this debate, but also looked forward to discussing the results in the hope that it might inform their own practice. From the perspective of the researcher, it was hoped that the project would enhance practice, not least when teaching Islam at degree level to those training to be Religious Education teachers.

3.491 Research Ethics and Governance Committee

The research project was submitted for scrutiny by the Research Ethics and Governance Committee of the University of Brighton and was approved on October 3rd 2006.
3.5 A Reflexive Account of the Research Process

In qualitative research complete objectivity is not possible. The task of the researcher is not to describe but to interpret, and this entails subjectivity. Qualitative research is itself a form of social enquiry which seeks to make sense of and interpret the social reality that is being studied (Holloway, 1997). It follows, therefore, that qualitative research can never be completely precise because analysis is dependent upon personal interpretation (Cresswell, 2003). Furthermore, within interpretative approaches it is acknowledged that the researcher is never an impassive and objective observer of the social world, but interacts with that world in a dynamic interplay (Oliver, 2008). Instead of attempting to eliminate the effect of the researcher, the task should be to ‘contextualise’ the data as fully as possible. Reflexivity is essential, whereby the researcher is aware of and reflects upon the potential impact he or she might have in the research setting and on the construction of meaning that will be the result of data analysis (Gilbert, 2008). Reflexivity has been defined as research that looks back on itself, where all is laid bare and nothing is left hidden (Gilbert, 2008). Throughout the research process the researcher sought to reflect upon his role, the effect that this could have had on the research setting, and its potential impact upon reliability and validity. Furthermore, whilst candidly acknowledging the impact of researcher effect, ways in which this could be limited were considered.

The background of the researcher

The researcher was an undergraduate in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster and studied under Ninian Smart. The phenomenological approach to the study of religion was therefore a paradigm with which he is familiar, and which dominated his own learning as an undergraduate. The researcher graduated in 1989 with a BA (Hons) in Religious Studies. His particular areas of interest were Christianity, Islam and Judaism, in particular the mystical tradition in those three religions. The researcher then undertook a PGCE at St. Martin’s College, Lancaster, completing in 1990. At St. Martin’s his principle tutor was John Hammond, who was at that time developing the experiential approach to Religious Education. The researcher,
therefore, was familiar with, and to some extent influenced by, both the phenomenological approach and the experiential approach. The exposure to both has perhaps influenced his belief that a mixed method approach to Religious Education is desirable.

In 1997 the researcher was awarded an MPhil by the University of Lancaster for a research project in the area of Biblical criticism, and has an interest in the primary sources of religions.

He is currently employed in the School of Education at the University of Brighton where he teaches world religions modules, and has a particular interest in Islam. He is also an ordained priest in the Church of England and is the coordinating chaplain at the University.

In reflecting upon previous experience and background the researcher is aware of the potential impact on the research project, not least ideas regarding pedagogy, the importance of the use of primary sources in Religious Education, and in his own religious and cultural background. At the same time there is also an awareness that the research has impacted on the practice of the researcher, not least in relation to diversity, competing issues of truth, and the need to explore challenging and controversial issues with his own students. This has been influenced by a study of the literature, as well as the ‘dynamic interplay’ between researcher and researched, not least in the interviews.

In reflecting upon the research project and the methods employed consideration was given to the limitations of the chosen methods, not least the potential impact on reliability and validity.
3.51 Validity and reliability

Interviews

Respondents’ attitudes

The first series of concerns related to the behaviour of respondents in the interview situation. How could one be sure that respondents were not influenced by loyalty, to school, department or subject? Would respondents be frightened of telling the whole truth for fear of being shown up? Would the respondent be affected by the role of the interviewer as a university lecturer and behave in a manner that might be over polite or even subservient? The researcher acknowledges that it is impossible to guarantee that these attitudes have been successfully overcome. The strategies that were employed in an attempt to limit such attitudes have been described in some detail above, not least in explaining the focus of the interview in great detail, along with the guarantee of confidentiality. The researcher also sought to modify respondents’ attitudes by conducting the interview in a relaxed and friendly manner, helping the participant to feel at ease. In order to achieve this each interview began with some general questions which would allow friendly discussion and would help to break down potential feelings of hierarchy that might be felt on the part of the participant. In this respect it was essential that the questioning was relaxed and friendly and not condescending or deferential (Fielding, & Thomas, 2008). This helped to convey the principle that the opinion of the participant was valued. In addition questions were often prefixed with ‘we’ to suggest a more egalitarian approach.

Interviewer bias

A great deal of research has been undertaken which acknowledges the potential impact of interviewer bias on the outcome of the interview process (Hyman, 1954; Sudman and Bradburn, 1974). There is a sense in which semi-structured interviews rely upon the part played by the interviewer in the guided conversation which takes place. This differs
from structured interviews where the role of the interviewer is limited (Fielding, & Thomas, 2008). Whilst it is difficult to see how interviewer bias can be totally eradicated, the researcher sought to limit this by ensuring that leading questions were avoided so as to prevent the participant answering questions in a manner that might elicit a desired response. Furthermore, although the interviews were semi-structured, there was also a degree of control on the part of the interviewer to ensure that the focus of the conversation represented the views and reflections of the participant, and not the interviewer. In this respect the researcher sought not to speak too much, or to be too aggressive in questioning, or to ask leading questions. The researcher had offered transcripts of interviews to interviewees. This would have helped in respect of validity. Sadly, no one took up the offer.

**Interview recording**

The researcher was aware of the potential issues that might arise from the manner in which the interviews were recorded: Whether the presence of the data recording machine impacted on the behaviour of the participant. Did he or she feel embarrassed? Did they feel uncomfortable? Did they behave in an unnatural manner? Whilst such factors can never be totally eradicated, in each case participants were asked if they would feel comfortable with the interview being recorded. Each expressed the view that they were happy for this to happen. The data recorder itself was small and unobtrusive and once the conversation began it did not appear as though the recorder was a factor in participant behaviour.

It was appreciated that a problem when interviewing using a digital data recorder is that there are limitations as to what can be recorded. A great deal of language is transmitted in a non verbal manner, such as body posture. Furthermore, when verbal recordings are transcribed the *manner* in which dialogue is spoken is lost. Whilst a video recording of interviews might have helped to log body language, this method would have been more intrusive than a small digital recorder. Where it was obvious that language was being conveyed by body language, or verbalized in a particular way (a sigh or exclamation) this was noted by the interviewer and appeared in the transcript.
The location of the interview

The location of interviews was dependent upon available space. This was particularly problematic when interviews had to be conducted in inappropriate areas. For example, the researcher reflected to what extent the responses of teachers were affected when interviews took place in busy staff rooms when colleagues were sitting nearby. The researcher attempted to overcome the potential for this problem by suggesting to participants that a suitable space for the interview might be identified prior to my visit, but the demands on space meant that this was not always possible.

Observations

Teacher and pupil behaviour

Whilst it was the intention for the researcher to be as unobtrusive as possible in the context of observation it is impossible to determine the extent to which pupil or teacher behaviour may have been affected by the presence of a stranger in their midst. This potential problem was further exacerbated in two of the lessons observed in which the teacher tried to include the researcher in the lesson by asking him questions. In these cases passivity was hard to sustain. In general, however, it was possible to sit quietly at the back of classrooms as a passive observer. Doubtless the presence of the researcher in the setting impacted upon both teacher and pupils, but it is impossible to determine to what extent. All one could do was be aware and acknowledge this.

Content analysis

The criticism that is often levelled at content analysis is that it can have a tendency to fragment data (Bryman, 2004). Whilst there might be some truth in this the benefits of subjecting data to content analysis far outweigh any possible downside, not least in making large volumes of data more manageable. It has been stated that content analysis should be ‘systematic’, ‘objective’, and ‘quantifiable’ (Kerlinger, 1986). Whilst this is
certainly the case with quantitative content analysis it is not necessarily so with qualitative content analysis; certainly the system adopted in this research was systematic, but in interpreting the data in qualitative research there will always be a degree of subjectivity (Miles and Hubermann, 1984). Nonetheless, the researcher sought to limit this by reflecting on the ‘steps’ detailed by Brenner et al (1985) in the planning stage, and in adopting a ‘tight’ system of coding at the analysis stage. This was intended to help towards reliability and validity.

3.52 Conclusion

It is understood by the researcher that validity and reliability are difficult challenges to overcome in relation to qualitative research, given that subjectivity is at the heart of this paradigm. Clearly if the same research were to be conducted by another researcher, the findings would be affected by his or her own background, and their impact on the research setting.

In the context of this research validity was sought through a variety of strategies. The triangulated approach detailed above considered the research questions from a variety of perspectives, with interviews, observations and content analysis each informing the other. The approach to interviews sought to alleviate some of the potential pitfalls, likewise the method of observation. The approach used in content analysis, leading to a detailed and tight pro-forma was intended to assist the possibility of reliability, helping to ensure that another researcher would conclude with similar results.

Ultimately, it is the nature of qualitative research that objectivity is never attainable, neither is it desirable. Rather the aim of qualitative research is to ‘rejoice in the indicative insight’.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS
Introduction

The research project identified a number of issues relating to the construction of Islam and in the potential constraints that may be placed upon teachers of Religious Education in respect of exam boards; curriculum mongers; text books and resources; and the community cohesion agenda. This study sought to investigate whether these factors create a construction of Islam that is distorted, and whether this construction is further influenced by pedagogy. The analysis, based upon interviews, observations and content analysis will be presented in three sections:

‘Curriculum Islam’

Pedagogy

Teachers and Resources

4.1: ‘Curriculum Islam’

Since September 2007 it has been the duty of all schools to promote community cohesion both in the ethos of the school and in the curriculum (DCSF, 2007). The guidance stated that,

‘... an effective school will have a high standard of teaching, learning and curriculum provision that supports high standards of attainment, promotes shared values and builds pupils’ understanding of the diversity that surrounds them, recognising similarities and appreciating different cultures, religions or beliefs, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds.’ (DCSF, 2007:8)

This would be inspected by Ofsted from 2008. The guidance also suggested that Religious Education had an important part in the promotion of ‘community cohesion’ and ‘shared values’. This reflected the ethos of the Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education which had been produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in 2004. From the late 1960’s, it could be argued, Religious Education had academic integrity in its own right as the only place where multi-cultural work was undertaken, it would appear that this was no longer the case.
Ofsted’s report, *Making Sense of Religion: A report on religious education in schools and the impact of locally agreed syllabuses*, published in 2007, had contended that one of the primary aims of teaching Religious Studies was to promote community cohesion and to educate for diversity (Ofsted, 2007: 41). If this is indeed the rationale for teaching Religious Education then one might suppose that it would affect the way in which religions are constructed for educational purposes. Furthermore, given that Ofsted’s comments were made in response ‘to the changing social reality of religion post-9/11’ (Ofsted, 2007: 39) one might assume that Islam would be a particular focus. Clearly the community cohesion dictate is a constraint with which teachers have to work. In interviews teachers were generally negative in their attitude to what they perceived to be political interference.

4.12 Teacher Attitudes, ‘Community Cohesion’ and ‘Educating for Diversity’

Durkheim (1858-1917) had argued that religion is a device to meet the societal needs of humanity and to provide social cohesion and moral responsibility. Clearly some teachers’ in the sample argued that the community cohesion agenda was being used precisely in the way in which Durkheim suggested, and that was *not* what they believed Religious Education was for. This was particularly the case with the head of department at school 2, teacher 2:1, who believed that the social cohesion/educating for diversity agenda was politically motivated and was *not* the purpose of Religious Education:

> My feeling is that that is not what I am here to do. I am not here to be a mouthpiece of whatever government happens to be making their policies for society.

He went on to argue that this ...

> Shows a mistaken idea – it seems to be going back to the kind of RE that we used to have in the ‘40’s and 50’s where it was assumed that Christianity was true and that we were just teaching them what they believe.

This, he argued, is telling teachers what they should think ‘towing the government line,’ but ‘students don’t like that and see through it.’
Teacher 2:1 also questioned the legitimacy of this ‘political agenda’ and wondered whether it was ill conceived, attempting to rid pupils of prejudices which they don’t actually have. In connection with Islam and post 9/11 what concerned him was that,

…actually students who are non-Muslims aren’t terribly aware. I think it is part of a bigger problem with …[name of town] … that they are just not aware of anything other than what happens in soap operas or ‘Hello’ magazine … but to a certain extent one sometimes feels that you are trying to get rid of prejudices they don’t have, and by doing that you are introducing them to ideas which they didn’t know about before.

On reflection, it could be argued that this particular teacher’s discomfort with the social cohesion agenda might relate to the context in which the school is located. School 2 is situated in a town with a sizeable refugee population, which has resulted in a degree of associated social unrest, including violence toward refugees, many of whom happened to be Muslim, and where there were attempts locally to encourage social cohesion. In the light of this the social cohesion agenda could be seen as part of a wider, politically motivated agenda. This might account for the comments made by the other Religious Education teachers in this school, which were generally negative toward the social cohesion agenda. Teacher 2:3 argued that the concepts of social cohesion and educating for diversity were, ‘true to some extent in that it helps people to be able to understand and get on with other people.’ However, this teacher was very clear that:

I don’t think the aim of RE is that we live in this really multi-faith and multi-cultural society and that we all need to get on with each other. I don’t think that is what I am trying to teach.

Teacher 2:4 thought that ‘it would be nice’ to promote community cohesion but that children of secondary school age have already made up their minds: ‘These girls have their prejudices, they have their stereotypes already’.

Of the teachers interviewed at school 2 only one, 2:3, appeared to be supportive, arguing that, ‘we live in a multi-cultural, multi-religious society’ and that, ‘if they learn something about different cultures and religions they are going to be a valuable member of society.’ The view of this teacher might reflect the fact that she was not a Religious Education specialist and might have had a different outlook on the purpose of Religious Education.
In school 1 there also appeared to be a degree of unease with regard to ‘community cohesion’. Like School 2, School 1 is located in a cosmopolitan conurbation in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture, although this is not particularly reflected in the student make up. Teacher 1:1, the head of department, argued that there was,

... a difference between what I think is the purpose of teaching RE in schools and maybe what the government says is the purpose of teaching RE in schools. I think the government has a generic attitude that it is good to teach about other faiths and to encourage community cohesion and the gelling of multi-faith societies [and the] promotion of racial tolerance ... sometimes I feel that is a little bit too rigid – what I feel, or the reasons I would interpret the importance of teaching [RE] is to get across a sense of more spirituality, or the spiritual side to students, and that is what I say I would like to focus my teaching on, but that is not always possible with the constraints of the curriculum.

This teacher also argued that the teaching of RE was made more difficult because pupils and their parents had preconceptions about religions which had developed within the society from which they come:

I think it is very difficult to get the students to understand why we do teach Religious Studies, because you are fighting a two pronged battle ... because it is the only subject they are forced, as it were, or as they see it, as being forced to learn, and it is obviously a subject that a lot of them have preconceptions about ... probably from their backgrounds ... and the communities they live in.

Teacher 1:2 was equally critical of the community cohesion agenda, regarding it as politically motivated. Although not against the concept of community cohesion, he stated that:

I have a bit of a problem with the government and official bodies trying to ... get society to believe in certain ways through ... things they [children] are taught in schools.

Whilst he acknowledged that there are ways of creating community cohesion:

I don’t think having a delivery of information to students about what different religions believe is the way to get community cohesion.

This teacher argued that there are people working across the world in the sphere of prejudice trying to create community cohesion by ‘working together to achieve a common goal’:
But saying to kids: “these people believe this, these people believe that, and if you understand what they believe you can all get on.” I don’t think it is as simple as that.

At this school only Teacher 1:3, a newly qualified teacher, expressed a different opinion to his colleagues, arguing that it was ‘definitely’ the role of Religious Education to help promote community cohesion and to educate for diversity:

In a faith school they have obviously got a mission statement and it’s a lot more kind of clear cut what their purposes are ... they’ve got more of an agenda for the want of a better word. But with a secular school community cohesion is important because it’s about rights and responsibilities of individuals as communities and how an individual contributes to a classroom community, a school community, the UK ... through RE they come into contact with diverse cultures and the similarities and differences between them. It helps children and young people get more of an idea of ... the differences and similarities between us as a race.

The divergent views of teacher 1:3 from the rest of his colleagues may be due to a number of factors: his recent training (which may have reflected the ‘social cohesion agenda’); his relative lack of experience and short time in the school; or perhaps his own cultural and religious background (he originated from a part of the world where there had been years of civil and religious unrest). His comments appear to relate as much to citizenship as to Religious Education.

In School 3, a school which is located in an area with little religious or ethnic diversity, completely different responses emerged. Teacher 3:3, a newly qualified teacher who had Muslim parents and was brought up Muslim, believed that educating for diversity and community cohesion within Religious Education was important, although she acknowledged particular difficulties in teaching non-Christian faiths in an area where there was little religious or cultural diversity. Likewise her colleague, 3:2, also spoke favourably and stated that:

I think it’s important for young people to learn about other religions and cultures and not just their own, not in order to indoctrinate them in any way but in order to widen their opinions on what other people believe, and to make sure they see other beliefs as just as important as their own and not theirs is the right one and everything else is secondary.

At School 4, which is not unlike School 3 in terms of its location and lack of ethnic or religious diversity, a more ambivalent attitude emerged, but one which was also broadly
favourable. Teacher 4:1, the head of department, was not entirely clear what was meant by the terms ‘social cohesion’ and ‘educating for diversity’, not least because ‘we don’t have a particularly multi-cultural society in this area.’ In a limited sense he agreed that, ‘RS is obviously important for the school community’ in terms of working together and group work to create cohesion among pupils. He did suggest that for the ‘young person understanding more about the world they are living in it’s going to make the community more cohesive.’ However, he was unclear as to how this would be relevant in the context of the locale in which the school is situated.

Teacher 4:2, on the other hand, drew a direct link between the importance of Religious Education and the events of 9/11 and 7/7:

The thing that drew me into teaching RS was the kids now, particularly because it was post 9/11 and 7/7 stuff. I felt it was imperative that kids understood people of different backgrounds and looking at religion in a positive way because the kids here, their parents tend to have a negative view of RS because when they did it it was Religious Instruction and so I would say our department and people of my generation as well … their approach to RS is totally different … it’s more cultural awareness and celebrating the differences between people, making it explicit.

This teacher argued that the purpose of Religious Education was ‘definitely’ to encourage community cohesion and to educate for diversity. She even went as far as to suggest that this was in her mind when she considered becoming an RE teacher: ‘I would say that is why I probably got into it,’ and the possibility that it might be part of a wider political agenda ‘had not crossed my mind’. However, she acknowledged that there were particular difficulties when attempting this in a locale which is not culturally diverse:

It’s tricky teaching RS in this school because if that is your aim it’s really hard to do it with the kids here because they are white and middle class … and so I struggle a lot with them being able to identify with things that are totally culturally different.

This teacher had previously worked in a school in an area which was very diverse and where it was ‘a totally different kettle of fish’. Here it was ‘more real’ where ‘religion meant something’ and where ‘you did have clashes, it was played out in front of you’.
Whilst she agreed that Religious Education should help to create social cohesion and educate for diversity:

I don’t think that it is something you can put into practice here because it’s kind of irrelevant because the community is predominantly white and middle class and so there is no, there aren’t different communities to bring together.

Furthermore, in her previous school religion was a ‘real’ issue and she felt she ‘could make a slight difference’. In her current school she argued that religion ‘doesn’t really mean anything to them … learning about Islam doesn’t really mean anything to them’.

At School 5, a Church of England school, there were mixed views when teachers were asked whether they felt the purpose of Religious Education was to help create community cohesion and to educate for diversity. Teacher 5:1, the head of department, initially responded with a long silence before suggesting that:

That makes it sound negative, doesn’t it. It’s basically saying that you need to be diverse … diversity is not bad but at the same time, that’s basically saying that’s all you should be doing … no.

This teacher felt that this was a political agenda, and whilst acknowledging that there is ‘nothing wrong’ with seeking to facilitate community cohesion: ‘I am not against it’, this teacher wanted to stress that:

RE is going to help you to understand and bring the community together, but at the same time you have got to celebrate difference as well.

In this sense teacher 5:1 appeared to be responding positively to the idea that Religious Education should educate for diversity.

Teacher 5:2 thought that ‘community cohesion’ and ‘educating for diversity’ were ‘nice words aren’t they!’ but was ambivalent as to whether that is what Religious Education is for. She did suggest that the school attempted to do this ‘in the sense that we try to bridge gaps’ by taking students to diverse places of worship and looking at religions comparatively. In this sense, she suggested, ‘we focus a lot on the diversity of religion and how it impacts life.’ Teacher 5:2 felt Religious Education was important:

Because obviously we are living in a multicultural society and that’s one of the most important things, and we need to educate … especially here … which is predominantly white middle class, they don’t seem to have any experience of
other cultures and traditions and it’s really important to educate as to what other cultures do and what other societies do.

In this respect Teacher 5:2 touched upon an interesting phenomenon. Within the sample it was generally the case that teachers in those schools which were located in ethnically diverse conurbations (schools 1 and 2) appeared to reject the ‘social cohesion’ agenda, seemingly because the teachers regarded it as part of a wider political and social programme, whereas teachers in those schools found in locations which were not ethnically or culturally diverse were more likely to argue in favour of educating for social cohesion and diversity on the grounds that it enabled those from ‘predominantly white middle class’ backgrounds to have an understanding of ‘what other cultures do and what other societies do.’

Teacher 5:3, an experienced teacher who is not a Religious Education specialist and has not been teaching Religious Education for very long, agreed to some extent with the concepts of community cohesion and educating for diversity:

I can see what they are getting at in that the first lesson [on Islam] I said to the kids: “What do you know about Islam?” And of course the first thing that comes up is terrorism … so there are these incredible stereotypes … and I would hope that by the end they have more understanding.

She felt that it was,

Important for them to understand and respect the views of the Muslim man who lives down the street, or the man who takes out his prayer mat in the airport, instead of laughing at him.

However, she did not think that this was the primary aim of teaching Religious Education. For her this was not only to ‘think and consider other peoples’ perspectives’ but to engage in their own personal exploration of life and its issues.

Teacher 6:1 was one of the few teachers who appeared to be aware of the community cohesion agenda and was ‘quite excited’ about it, not least because she felt that at this school, ‘RE contributes so much to it’. She argued that because the school was not a diverse community it was necessary to be outward looking, not least in respect of faith, since school 6 is a Roman Catholic School. She felt it was ‘really important’ that
students were, ‘aware of the world that they are growing up in’. They regularly gave students opportunities to engage in dialogue with those of other faiths, and invited Muslim students to the school on an annual basis. However, this tended to happen at sixth form level and not Key Stages 3 or 4.

Teacher 6:2 argued that Religious Education was essential in creating a sense of community cohesion within the school because within the context of the school Religious Education was at the ‘centre of the community’. Within the wider society, and in respect of divergent faiths, she felt that Religious Education was extremely important in engendering respect and understanding, and in creating community cohesion:

I like to think that it is ... and I like to think that how we teach RE in this school is doing that because it’s making people aware of other beliefs.

She also suggested that it taught pupils that, ‘we shouldn’t discriminate or judge’ and we should be ‘open-minded’.

The comments at this school appear to confirm the phenomenon evident across the sample, that schools which are not diverse, or from areas with little diversity, tend to be very supportive of the idea of community cohesion, largely because the teachers believe that it is important for students to be aware of the beliefs of others. Those in more diverse areas were more suspicious and regarded it as a politically motivated agenda. This, perhaps, reflects the greater sensitivity in areas of ethnic and religious diversity.

4.13: Exam Syllabuses, Locally Agreed Syllabuses and Community Cohesion

Of the three different agreed syllabuses used in the sample schools two have not been revised since 2005. As such they do not specifically reflect the concept of community cohesion. The schools which these syllabuses apply to are schools 1; 2; 3 and 4. However, one of the local authorities which produces the syllabus which applies to schools 2; 3 and 4 has published guidance on community cohesion which has a brief section on promoting shared values in Religious Education. This talks about examining similarities and differences between religions; avoiding oversimplifying; exploring historical and philosophical links between religions; and investigating unity in diversity within and between religions. Schools 5 and 6 are both faith schools and so have a
degree of freedom in determining their syllabus, but in both cases their syllabus is based loosely on the same locally agreed syllabus which was updated in 2008 and which does reflect the concept of community cohesion, mentioning it three times, and in the context of racial harmony and interfaith dialogue.

The Edexcel GCSE syllabus has recently been rewritten and includes some new content which reflects the community cohesion agenda; specifically: How an issue from community cohesion has been presented in one form of the media; How religions help community cohesion; Why it is important to take part in democratic and electoral processes; and the United Nations and world peace. These new topics are reflected in the updated text books for this GCSE. However, the new syllabus did not begin until the academic year 2009-2010, after the data was collected for this research project.

4.14: Conclusion

Clearly the concept of community cohesion will impact greatly on schools in general, and on Religious Education in particular, not least as Ofsted continues to bear this in mind when undertaking inspections. What was most surprising in the interviews is that of the eighteen teachers that were interviewed only four were aware of DCSF (2007) or Ofsted (2007). Community cohesion was a new term for the majority. Clearly it was not considered a priority, with some teachers openly hostile and regarding it as a political agenda and not something that Religious Education was for. Religious Education, they would argue, has its own justification as an academic study. It was not clear that teachers were explicitly teaching for community cohesion, although clearly concepts like respect and understanding, empathy and tolerance were high on their agenda. For schools 1; 2; 3 and 4, community cohesion was not yet reflected in their locally agreed syllabus, although some very basic guidance had been produced by one local authority. This mentions the needs to guard against oversimplifying, and the need to reflect on issues of diversity within religious traditions. It will be argued here that oversimplification does occur in the construction of Islam and that diversity is largely ignored. The advice also suggests that similarities between religions, and historical and philosophical links should be explored. This might suggest an approach which presents religious traditions as
representing different expressions of the same search for meaning. It will be argued here that such an approach denies conflicting issues of truth which are at the heart of religious belief.

The locally agreed syllabus adapted at schools 5 and 6 only gives very general guidance on community cohesion in respect of racial harmony and interfaith dialogue. It is difficult to see how such basic advice will impact on the construction of Islam in those schools.

The impact of the new Edexcel syllabus is not reflected in this research since it only came into being in the academic year 2009-2010, after the interviews had taken place and the data collected. In respect of Islam it will only affect one school in the sample, school 1, since school 2 replaced Islam with Hinduism from that year.

4.15 ‘Acceptable’ Islam

The ‘community cohesion’ agenda, it could be argued, presented one constraint upon teachers of Religious Education, whether one disagreed with it or embraced it. In the course of interviews other factors emerged which further constrained teachers. The literature review reflected on the assertion by Wright (1993) which suggested that Religious Education often followed what he termed the ‘narrow winding lane’ which he argued was the option of greater safety. Here, he suggested, Religious Education is ‘pre-packaged’ with its rough edges and its contradictions smoothed over (Wright, 1993, p.11). Hayward (2006) went further by arguing that Religious Education often claims the apologetic role for religions which are presented as being ‘safe’ and a ‘good thing’ (2006: 154) and Philip Barnes had suggested that the phenomenological approach to the study of religion, which he argued remained dominant, led to a construction in which religions are presented in such a way as to cause no offence. The teachers interviewed suggested that many of these assertions were particularly pertinent with regard to the construction and teaching of Islam.

Teacher 4:2 intimated that religions were often constructed in the classroom in a way that ignored difficult issues and presented a ‘safe’ vision in which all religions were seen as different paths to ‘truth’,
… we are trying to portray, I don’t want to use the word politically correct, but I guess that is what we are trying to do, … maybe we are trying to portray a fair representation of all the religions, and I guess we tend to fall back on all of the religions being different paths to the truth.

When the interviewer asked whether this might possibly be in order to promote community cohesion the answer was an emphatic ‘yes!’

Almost every teacher acknowledged that when teaching Islam they tended to be over sympathetic, often ignoring issues that might cause offence either to Muslims or non-Muslims. The most common comment was that teachers felt an obligation to present Islam in a positive light to counteract negative stereotyping in the media. Teacher 4:1 even used the phrase ‘PR Islam’ to describe the construction of Islam that he presents, accepting that he ‘definitely’ overcompensated when teaching Islam and was ‘always … very positive about Islam … battling against preconceptions’.

Teacher 4:2 acknowledged that she overcompensated when teaching Islam: ‘Yes … absolutely’. She also commented that many of the text books also overcompensated, a point also raised by 2:2 who suggested that some text books, ‘paint a whiter than white side of Islam’ even to the extent that sometimes they ‘denigrate other people beliefs about Islam too far’.

In recent years school 5 had seen a number of refugee children enrolled at the school, many of whom were Muslim children from Afghanistan. Teacher 5:2 acknowledged that this has led her to change the way in which taught Islam, and to overcompensating:

I think I have had to, my lesson plans haven’t changed … but I have had to in discussions … I have almost had to in the controlling of the conversation because if you do have Muslim boys sat in the room I can imagine how uncomfortable they must be feeling … I have almost had to overcompensate … and actually pull out the positives.

At School 6 teacher 6:2 acknowledged the potential issue of overcompensating when teaching Islam. When asked if she felt that she overcompensated when teaching Islam she acknowledged that this was possible but also suggested that she sometimes did the same with Christianity:

When you’ve got the Pope going on about homosexuality … The students come in … and they will question and they want justification.’
At the same time, however, she recognised that this was an issue, ‘less with Christianity than with Islam, because it is so much in the media.’

4.16 Negative Stereotyping

The construction of ‘acceptable Islam’ was to a large extent a reaction to negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslims from pupils, parents, and the media. This phenomenon, therefore, imposed another constraint on teachers which led to a construction of Islam which sought to dispel negative stereotyping, and was reflected in text books, schemes of work, lesson plans, and lessons themselves. Whilst many teachers claimed that there was little prejudice towards Islam from pupils, most acknowledged prejudice from parents and in the media, which led to them overcompensating when teaching Islam.

4.161 Pupils and Prejudice: Reflections from Teachers

Teacher 1:1 suggested that negative stereotyping and prejudice, though problematic in the past, were no longer an issue: ‘When there was 9/11 and the London bombings there was a lot ... recently we haven’t had it so much’. This view was also expressed by other teachers at schools in the sample. As 9/11 becomes ‘history’ rather than ‘memory’ negative stereotyping appears to diminish among pupils, although not necessarily so with their parents.

Teacher 1:1 suggested that the liberal mentality among the community which forms the catchment area for the school led to an accepting mindset:

In our community around here it is a predominantly white middle class community so you do get those Guardian type reader mentalities where “we are all going to be jolly nice to the Muslims and Jews”.

This teacher did however point to a particular problem which had led to a Muslim pupil being temporarily withdrawn from Religious Education. There appeared to be three reasons why this had occurred. First, during a lesson on Judaism, it had emerged that, unbeknown to the pupil, her best friend whom she had had home for tea was Jewish. She was herself from a Palestinian Muslim background. Secondly, during a lesson on Islam a film had been shown which she perceived to present a negative view of Islam.
This had led to the pupil believing that the school was anti-Islamic. Thirdly, she felt that the lessons on Islam did not present what she believed Islam to be. The construction of Islam at school conflicted with that given by her father at home and was, in her eyes, incorrect. Teacher 1:1 perceived that her understanding that, ‘we didn’t teach it properly’, merely indicated, ‘that is not what my father teaches me’. This raises interesting issues relating to the construction of Islam from the perspective of her practicing Muslim father, which clearly conflicted with the construction of Islam at her school.

To some extent one wondered whether teachers did not want to admit Islamophobia out of loyalty to the school. For example 1:2 argued that, ‘... in my experience I have seen very little Islamophobia’. However, he also stated that the individual in the school with responsibility for race relations claimed that it represented the highest level of prejudice in the school, with seven or eight cases in the previous year. After further discussion with teacher 1:2 it appeared that pupils did indeed offer comments which were clearly expressing negative stereotypes:

In lessons you get questions like “if they are so peace loving why do they chop hands off?” and that sort of stuff. “Why do they strap bombs to chests?”... I had some year 11’s this year who would always remind me that Muhammad had a nine year old wife: “does that make him a paedophile?”

At the same school, teacher 1:3 also acknowledged that pupils sometimes displayed negative stereotypes about Muslims. In a recent lesson for year nine students one had asked him: ‘Why are we learning about this, all Muslims are terrorists.’

At school 2 a different picture emerged. Here it appeared as though there was little, if any, negative stereotyping. This might be partly due to the small, but not insignificant minority of Muslim pupils at the school. Whilst teacher 2:1 acknowledged that: ‘Our students have always been good at expressing their opinions’, he did not feel that pupils were terribly conscious with regard to the negative presentation of Islam in the Media.

Teacher 2:2 said that pupils often began by being very negative about Islam, but they did not appear to be expressing negative stereotypes as such. Rather they could not
understand why they were studying Islam at all if they were not Muslim. Clearly these pupils had a very outdated understanding of what Religious Education was for, and the community cohesion agenda was not even on their radar!

Teacher 2:3 had a news board in the classroom on which she encouraged pupils to add any news stories which related to Islam. These were often stories which presented Islam in a negative light. These negative stereotypes were then challenged in class discussions.

Teacher 2:4 argued that he had not seen any examples of pupils presenting negative stereotypes of Muslims. He suggested that this may be due fact that there are Muslim girls in the school.

Teacher 3:1, detected a change of attitude toward Muslims in the recent past, particularly since 9/11 and 7/7 were regarded by pupils as past history. She suggested that when she first joined the school negative stereotyping was,

... astronomical across all years groups, and I think that was the media at the time ... Muslims were terrorists, they were suicide bombers, they were going to do XYZ, and this is how they looked, and this is what you had to be fearful of ... And that is all students could associate with Islam, there was no positivity at all.

However, along with other teachers in the sample she felt that, ‘I don’t think now there is as much, maybe because we have reached saturation point, or memories have faded’. She was not convinced that Religious Education has been responsible for this phenomenon. In fact, when asked whether she felt that Religious Education had helped to diminish negative stereotyping she argued that:

I don’t think often we have been successful - I think that once students start getting to 11, 12 13, breaking that away and getting independent thinkers is really hard ... Breaking away from the values of your parents is really hard to do.

At the same school both teacher 3:2 and teacher 3:3 offered a slightly different perspective. Teacher 3:2 suggested that whilst one might expect pupils to present negative stereotypes when beginning a study of Islam this disposition would change as the students learnt more. This point was further emphasized by teacher 3:3, herself from a Muslim background. She reflected that:
I had initial comments about terrorists: “Are they all terrorists”. But then I was really pleasantly surprised because that didn’t really go very far and I heard far more positive things.

At school 4 teacher 4:1 agreed that negative stereotyping was an issue when pupils first began to study Islam, but ‘the further they get into Islam, the less of it we see’.

Teacher 4:2, however, did not agree and argued that, ‘... negative stereotyping is rife’. She also felt that, ‘... it’s a massive problem.’ This teacher suggested that she encountered a negative disposition towards Islam all of the time and, furthermore, she argued that although negative stereotypes were always challenged, this appeared to have little effect on pupils negative disposition towards Islam. When asked in interview whether she felt students left the school feeling less negative she responded:

No, the same, because they come in here with a view, I challenge the view all of the time, they go out that door and they ... see what they see on TV, they hear what they hear from their friends and their parents, and they go back to their previous view.

At school 5 teacher 5:2 felt that negative stereotyping was mainly a problem among lower ability students. When she begins teaching the Islam module she asks the pupils: ‘What do you know about Islam?’ And the response is generally: “All Muslims are terrorists”. She described some of the comments which pupils make as ‘outrageous’, and commented that, ‘... they are shouting out things like, “Are we going to learn about the Taliban today?” That’s all they want to learn about.’ Teacher 5:2 suggested that the presence of refugees from Afghanistan in the school may have encouraged this and had added an interesting dimension to the study of Islam:

Its created more conversations about it ... they want to know if they are suicide bombers and if they are part of the Taliban ... and they are fascinated ... before ... I would teach the Taliban and no one was really interested ... whereas now as soon as you write ‘Islam’ on the board: “Are we going to learn about the Taliban?”

Teacher 5:1, the head of department, suggested that negative stereotyping would often be displayed when they were studying the concept of Jihad. In this context she suggested that, ‘the word “terrorism” inevitably comes up’. She felt that this was, ‘... probably the biggest area we have to fight against, explaining that not all Muslims, that very few Muslims, are involved in extremism.’
Teacher 5:3 argued that when beginning to teach Islam the pupils came with ‘incredible stereotypes’, and her hope was that a study of the faith would go some way toward dispelling these. On the day on which she was interviewed the school were engaged in an activity day. Teacher 5:3 had organised a trip to a Mosque in Surrey and was disappointed that not enough students had indicated that they would go, leading to its cancellation:

It could have been because there was a very popular history trip … and it could be the economic situation … it could be parents are saying I am not coughing up so many pounds for an additional school activity.

When asked if this could have been because it was a visit to a Muslim place of worship, indicating a possible negative inclination toward Islam, the teacher suggested that this was a possibility:

Well, it could have, and that’s the sort of question in my mind really, that they weren’t hugely motivated or interested to go and see a mosque, and I don’t know if that’s because of this underlying negative feeling about Islam.

At school 6 teacher 6:1 argued that she did not experience negative stereotyping of Islam from the pupils. When asked if she heard negative comments from students she stated that, ‘... the kids don’t at all’. She also suggested that the situation had been very different four or five years previously when the events of 9/11 were more recent. Even in relation to terrorism, she claimed that pupils did not stereotype all Muslims as terrorists: ‘No not at all ... And that’s why we don’t deal with the terrorism thing’. This was not, however, the impression given by other teachers in the school. 6:2 spoke of the problems she had encountered in the previous year when teaching Islam to year 9 children. She claimed that it had been, ‘a bit of a battle’ because of negative stereotypes which she perceived had come from the media:

As soon as you mentioned Islam ... You got all of those kind of stereotypes being shouted out and stupid noises being made and I found that I wanted to rush through the module.

This year, she suggested, it had been very different and the students had been much more ‘open’ and they ‘wanted to know’ about Islam. She was unclear why this was the case given that there was only a year between the two groups, but suggested that it might be just, ‘the dynamics of the group’.
6:3 commented that pupils often began the module on Islam with a negative disposition toward the faith and that this was sometimes expressed by negative stereotyping: ‘When we did our first lesson on Islam there were all sorts of comments ... mainly media focused to be honest ... The word terrorism came up a lot.’ There were also issues about women’s rights and the perception, particularly among female students, that women were, ‘not treated as they should be.’

4.162 The influence of Parents and the Media

A common reflection from teachers was that the negative stereotypes displayed by pupils were merely a reflection of the views of parents or of the construction of Islam presented by the Media. The type of comments made by 3:1 was common:

Students come in with clear attitudes from their parents and the challenge is that the negative attitudes are often coming from the parents. How do you get this across to the kids? Because if you challenge them there is a danger that a message goes back to the parents saying ‘you know what, you are wrong’ [and so] there is a balance to be kept between hopefully educating the child who can then go on and maybe educate the parents.

2:2 reflected that: ‘what you get is what they are fed ... You can hear the parents talking through them’. Similarly 3:2 suggested that some of the negative comments about Islam displayed by pupils, ‘come not from themselves but from their parents’.

5:2 felt that pupils often acted up to stereotypes that they had heard or seen from parents or in the Media: ‘They all talk about the twin towers, and a lot of them are repeating parents views’. At the same school teacher 5:1 argued that: ‘What we’ve noticed is actually it’s the parents and not the boys that are the most prejudiced.’

6:1 similarly suggested that in her experience parents are the ones who are prejudiced and not students: ‘Our parents are more prejudiced than our students’. Parents frequently complained that their children were learning about Islam: ‘I’ve had a letter from a parent telling me, “you’re teaching my child to be a terrorist”.’

A negative disposition toward Islam from parents had also caused problems for teachers at parents’ consultation evenings. 4:1 was not alone in expressing the concerns that parents brought with them when meeting teachers: ‘On parents’ days we get asked quite a lot of questions: “why are you doing this?” [studying Islam].’ He argued that parents
were ‘nervous’ that pupils were being indoctrinated, and suggested that this displayed a lack of understanding as to the purpose of Religious Education among parents. Some of the comments made by them at parents’ evenings, he claimed, bordered on the racist.

Many of those teachers who suggested a link between pupil and parental attitudes also argued that the way in which the media represented Islam had an impact on negative stereotyping. Indeed it was suggested that parents’ views on Islam derived largely from its presentation in the media.

From the pedagogical point of view it was interesting to hear from teachers how they sought to challenge the negative stereotypes presented by pupils, and the negative presentation of Islam often portrayed by the media.

Every teacher clearly stated that they would challenge negative comments made by pupils in the classroom. In general teachers suggested that they would challenge the negative comments *rather than* the pupil. More than one teacher suggested that they felt 'obliged' to challenge negative stereotypes. It was suggested earlier that one of the ways in which negative stereotypes were challenged was by ‘overcompensating’ and presenting Islam in a positive light.

4.163 Islamophobia: Evidence from lesson observations

There was little evidence of negative stereotyping or Islamophobia in the lesson observations. This may have been due to the fact that at all of the schools at which observations took place pupils had been studying Islam for some time. In interviews teachers had suggested that negative comments toward Islam tended to be made at the beginning, with pupils displaying more respect as they learnt more.

However, there were some examples of a negative disposition towards Islam. At school 1 a lesson given to a year 9 class on the theme of ‘War and Peace’ began with teacher 1:1 talking about the ‘War on Terror’. Her presentation gave a very Western view, not least when dealing with the conflict in Iraq. She began by asking the question: ‘Who was that evil dictator?’ She went on to argue that the war in Iraq was: ‘To get rid of him’, and to, ‘...get rid of WMD’. This was all then written on the board for pupils to copy down. During the course of this lesson the issue of terrorism emerged at an early
stage. Some pupils associated Islam with the Taliban. The teacher was quick to challenge pupils over this, not least those who associated all Muslims with terrorism: ‘I don’t think it’s fair to call them all terrorists’. At one point a pupil suggested that Saddam Hussein was, ‘... the son of bin Laden’. This was quickly corrected by the teacher. During the lesson 1:1 laid great stress on greater jihad, suggesting that lesser jihad was fought only in self defence and within strict rules. However there was also an implication from the teacher that all Muslims would engage in lesser jihad if certain conditions prevailed.

In a lesson on the hajj at School 4 some pupils groaned when they realized they had a lesson on Islam. There was also a certain amount of ‘silliness’ on the part of pupils, but this was quickly challenged by the teacher.

At School 5, in a lesson on the Qur’an, some of the students asked questions about the Afghan pupils in the school and what they believed, but generally these were not negative questions. However, at one point a pupil in the class made a machine gun gesture towards another pupil, but this was not seen by the teacher, and therefore went unchallenged.

4.164 Negative Stereotyping: Text Books and Resources

Elsewhere, in a section specifically dealing with teachers and resources, this study will suggest that text books and other resources employed for the teaching of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4 present a positive disposition towards Islam, even to the point of overcompensating. In this way it could be argued that these resources seek to challenge negative stereotypes of Islam by stressing positive attributes of the faith. The same resources occasionally tackle Islamophobia and head on.

For example, in Islam for Today by Angela Wood, the author seeks to pre-empt any negative stereotyping in respect of spitting during Ramadan by telling a story of a secondary head teacher and his understanding towards a Muslim girl in his school. In the same book pupils are given a task where they are required to take an item from the media about Islam and reflect on the way it is presented; is it positive or negative? Can they detect Islamophobia?
Rosalyn Kendrick in *Examining Religions: Islam* also attempts to break down negative stereotypes and engender respect and understanding by reflecting upon some of the difficult choices that Muslims have to make in order to show their submission to Allah. She is at pains to stress the reason why Muslim women dress modestly and wear the veil. Why Muslims prefer girls and boys to be educated separately. The author explains that arranged marriages need the consent of both parties, again attempting to dispel a common misconception (however, in not mentioning the reality of enforced marriage and discussing this, one could argue that this is a distortion).

In *Religions and Beliefs* by Musharraf Hussain and Anne Jordan, there is a good section on lifestyle choices for Muslims, along with a ‘problem page’ raising difficulties that young Muslims might face growing up in the United Kingdom (for example cosmetic surgery, vanity, online chatting with boys, smoking and drinking). There are also passages which seek to dispel negative stereotypes, and encourage pupils to reflect upon prejudice. This same book reflects upon the prejudice that Muslims face as a result of 9/11: ‘Terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and in London in 2005 have fuelled this - along with a lot of ignorance about Islam.’(35). The authors include some good questions for pupils to consider, for example: ‘Prejudice is usually based upon ignorance and stupidity. What could local mosques do to educate the wider community about Islam and their community?’ (35).

In general the resources within the sample, with the exception of Hussain and Jordan, do not really tackle the theme of terrorism in any depth, if at all. When they do they generally distinguish between ‘terrorists’ and ‘Muslims’, as though the former do not belong to the latter category. Hussain and Jordan are also guilty of this. This is rather disingenuous since those committing acts of terror clearly associate themselves as Muslim. Denying this is not likely to stop prejudice, rather it is more likely to fuel it. Perhaps it would be more helpful if text books sought to explain the causes of extremism, rather than simply suggesting that terrorists are not really Muslims, which is implied by Hussain and Jordan, Kendrick, and Aylett and O’Donnell.

Sometimes text books raise important issues which could be the focus of negative stereotyping and which perhaps should be given more comprehensive treatment. For
example in Victor Watton’s *Religion and Society* there is a section on forgiveness which details the command in Islam to forgive, backed up with quotations from primary sources. We are then told that, ‘Muslims should not forgive those who are working against Islam, or those who are denying Muslim principles’. (86). Given that this would probably include those pupils who happened not to be Muslim, one would have thought more attention could have been given to this statement in order to prevent a negative disposition toward Islam. Similarly, the book mentions the potential for capital punishment for those guilty of apostasy, but again this difficult topic is given little attention.

In an in-house revision booklet used for GCSE students in School 1 there is a section on Islam and punishment, which might also reinforce negative stereotypes. For example Surah 5:41 is presented to claim that Muslims believe the thief should be mutilated. Surah 24: 2 is also presented when reflecting upon the punishment for fornication. The suggestion is that all Muslims regard such punishments for these crimes as normative. In the same booklet when reflecting upon capital punishment, we are told that there are potentially opposing views in Islam on this issue. However, the booklet claims that the position which opposes capital punishment is based on, ‘The non religious argument’, which would appear to be a distortion given that those who hold this view would presumably not regard it as ‘non religious’.

### 4.165 Negative Stereotyping: Syllabuses, schemes of work, lesson plans and policy documents

Challenging negative stereotyping is rarely mentioned explicitly in policy documents, schemes of work or lesson plans. This is not surprising since it is *implicit* in Religious Education itself which seeks to engender greater understanding, along with respect and understanding of other faiths and beliefs. This is summed up in a statement from a policy document from school 2 which details the aims and objectives of Religious Education at this school. The aim of Religious Education, it states, is to, ‘... portray a world view as seen from different religious and cultural perspectives and thereby communicate how it feels to be from another religious, ethnic or cultural group.’ The document goes on to state that the school chooses resources which do not:
• ‘stereotype individuals or groups

• equate the white man or any one religion with civilisation

• use paternalistic approaches to other peoples, cultures or religions.

• reduce all non-western religions to the exotic, picturesque and primitive.’

The policy also addresses issues such as discrimination, the role of the media, and the significance of the religious background in the current conflicts, as well as addressing both the benefits that religion has given to the world, as well as the problems.

At the same school the scheme of work relating to the Edexcel GCSE syllabus picks up on some of the topics where pupils could be encouraged to reflect upon possible issues of negative stereotyping, and to relate this to particular issues in the local area. For example pupils are encouraged to reflect on racial issues in their local community. Elsewhere they are to reflect on the Muslim attitude to punishment and to question whether this has been unfairly stereotyped by non Muslims.

In school 4 the scheme of work based upon the locally agreed syllabus reflects upon dispelling negative stereotypes about Islam and fostering respect and understanding. Pupils investigate practices of Islam which affect daily life, and reflect upon the difficulty of Ramadan for Muslims. They are asked to evaluate a current topic of interest from a Muslim perspective. Likewise at school 5 the scheme of work, based upon a different locally agreed syllabus, attempts to dispel negative stereotyping with regard to jihad. This section begins with the question: ‘Is war always wrong?’ It reflects upon the situation in the Middle East, and examines the conditions for jihad. Pupils are asked to consider whether the 9/11 attacks could be considered to be jihad. They also reflect upon fundamentalism, extremist Islam, and the rest of the Islamic world. As a homework task pupils are asked the question: ‘How could we help countries affected by fundamentalism?’ In a lesson on ‘Women in Islam’ the aim is stated as: ‘To begin to dispel stereotypes and understand that most Muslim women are free from oppression.’ Unfortunately it says nothing about those that are not free from oppression.
At school 6, in the PowerPoint presentations that form the basis of the lessons on Islam, great stress is played upon respecting the beliefs of the other, but there is little detail. In one lesson the distinction between arranged marriages and forced marriage is stressed (the latter being considered illegal in Islam). However the lesson does not open up the issue of women’s rights and the role of women in Islam, even in the context of marriage. Indeed, no difficult issues appear to be raised at all.

Teachers in the sample acknowledged that they overcompensated when teaching Islam, stressing the positives of the religion. This, they suggested, was to counteract the negative portrayal of Islam in the Media and negative stereotyping. Teachers within the sample offered differing assessments of the issue of negativity toward Islam. Most teachers acknowledged that it was, or had been, a problem. Some teachers suggested that it is diminishing as 9/11 becomes a distant memory, whilst others felt that it was still a huge issue. In School 2, where there was a small, but significant minority of Muslim pupils, negative stereotyping appeared to be less of a problem than in schools which had little or no Muslim representation. This may indicate that association or friendship with Muslim pupils may lead to a more positive disposition to the faith. Parental attitudes, fuelled by the construction of Islam presented by the Media, appeared to be a significant factor in pupil attitudes. Some teachers felt that Religious Education did not have an impact on pupil attitudes, suggesting that parents and the media might have a greater influence on their understanding of Islam. Perhaps this raises an important issue in relation to the phenomenon of overcompensating by teachers and in resources. If Religious Education is to challenge the negative construction of Islam presented in the Media and reinforced by parental attitudes then perhaps it needs to present an ‘accurate’ portrayal of Islam; one which does not shy away from difficult attitudes but which seeks to understand them, and which presents Islam as rich, diverse and vibrant. This will entail a study which tackles difficult issues such as terrorism, women’s rights, jihad, and crime and punishment, but which seeks to understand rather than to ignore. In this way pupils will have the tools and knowledge to challenge negative stereotypes, and to understand that the portrayal of Islam so often presented in the media is just one expression of the Islamic faith and, in most cases, a minority expression at that.
4.17 Homogeneity and Islam

The review of the literature suggested a general concern that in Religious Education, there is a danger of a consensual portrayal of religions in which diversity is ignored and contradiction and conflict obscured. The pedagogical conflict between Wright (2008) and Jackson (2008), which was detailed in the literature review, concerned, at least in part, Wright’s assertion that contextual Religious Education, of which he believed Jackson to be an exponent, led to a construction of religions based upon consensus. Jackson (2001), on the other hand, argues that since the Enlightenment religions have been regarded as static and stable systems of belief, which he regards as a false Western construction. In this sense Jackson is calling for more account to be taken of diversity within religious traditions. Hayward (2006), in her research based upon Christianity, suggested that in Religious Education religions were constructed in such a way as to meet the perceived needs of the curriculum. The questions she raises are pertinent to the teaching and study of all religions. Hayward suggested that ‘Curriculum Christianity’ is a construct which is devoid of contradiction or conflict, a consensual image of faith where diversity and difference is obscured and where religion is rendered in such a way as to be seen as ‘safe’ and a ‘good thing’ (2006: 154). Hayward also argued that deference was often paid to the dominant tradition.

In section 4:3 we will consider whether text books and other resources present a consensual and homogenous construction of Islam. The interviews suggested that Hayward’s notion that ‘curriculum Christianity’ was a construction of the faith as rendered for Religious Education, is also true of Islam. Every teacher acknowledged that they generally taught Islam as a homogenous religion and paid little attention to diversity, or to Islam as a dynamic and living faith tradition. Deference was paid to the dominant Sunni tradition, to the detriment of other expressions of the faith. There were a number of constraints on teachers which led to this construction. Clearly the issues detailed above regarding cohesion, stereotyping and ‘acceptable Islam’ act as constraints in this respect. Others concerned a lack of time, or the desire not to make Islam too complicated. A number of teachers argued that the pressures of assessment, not least public examinations, led to a construction of Islam that was simplistic and homogenous in the belief that this would lead to better grades. This would affect both the department
and the school in terms of league tables. Teachers considered this a major constraint which led to a narrow construction of Islam. One teacher even stated that what was taught for exam purposes was a ‘bog standard’ version of Islam (teacher 1:1).

The major concern for teacher 1:1 were the demands of the exam syllabus, and the need to get good results, and this dominated her construction of Islam. She described the teaching of Islam as ‘almost like a rote learning process, but that is the exam syllabus’. This prevented teachers from teaching Islam in the way in which they would wish:

There is a dichotomy between what teachers would ideally like to do and what they must do for results. Between trying to achieve community cohesion and instil a sense of spirituality, and exams and a lack of time … if you don’t get good exam results then you get hauled up by the headmaster and asked why? I am not a magician, I have to bog standardly stick to the syllabus.

1:1 argued that the situation had been exasperated by a reduction in lesson time which had an additional effect on what was taught, and how. In the past,

... we were able to teach the course in a very creative way using lots of role play and things like that. We can't do that anymore because we have had our time taken away from us.

She argued that this had meant that they have to be,

Really focussed on teaching the exam, which I find tedious and the students find tedious because the little bits of video, the U tube clips and the role play and the discussion work had to go, and these are the things that make the subject interesting for the students.

This teacher acknowledged that the pressure of examinations and the lack of time had led to a construction of Islam which was dominated by the need to achieve good results, ‘It’s just exam technique’, and this was lamented:

A year ago I would have said I quite enjoyed teaching the Edexcel syllabus because I had time to … put my own slant on it, but I can’t do that anymore.

This was not just due to the lack of time: ‘We are forced into this by the syllabus as well.’ 1:1 compared this with the teaching in the lower school which was more experiential (‘all of us prefer experiential’) and argued that here, where there is not pressure from public examinations, ‘we really come into our own’. However, Islam is
not taught in the lower school at School 1, and is only taught as part of the exam syllabus.

Teacher 1:1 described a lesson on Islam as:

Bog standard get the text books out, here’s some notes, let’s do some key words, let’s answer some exam questions – it’s quite mind numbing to tell you the truth … none of us enjoy teaching to the exam … although we have to.

Similar comments were expressed by two more teachers at School 1. 1:2 argued that:

It seems to have moved away from the whole spiritual idea of understanding that many, many people on the planet … believe that there is something else out there other than the material things that everyone else is so focussed on.

Once again the need to obtain good marks in examinations impacted on the way in which Islam was constructed:

It’s been my feeling in schools of late that we are very much driven to getting qualifications and results … a shift away from educating the child, and moving towards making the child achieve a set of grades.

This meant that:

They have to give basic facts about what these religions do so the kids can remember them, write them down in the exam, and get the grade that everyone wants them to get.

This teacher also suggested that the cut in time had impacted. In the past there was the opportunity to teach Islam in a more ‘spiritual way’ and to explore issues in more depth. This had now changed:

Here, because we have had our time reduced, you have literally to say: “This lesson today we have the objective of doing these points, you’ve got to learn that, that, that and that, come on let’s focus on it!”

The demand for examination success had particular implications for less able students:

When it comes to exam time you are told to focus on certain students – concentrating on the C/D students. I have heard people say: “E/F students, people who are going to get G’s and F’s and E’s, don’t worry about them.” Because you are so focussed on getting your grades … because that is the criteria by which everyone measures the school.
Asked whether the Islam was constructed as being a homogenous religion or something that was diverse and fluid 1:2 acknowledged that the former was true. There was no room for diversity and ‘the text books don’t give room for it’.

1:3 also acknowledged that his lessons are geared toward exam technique:

The kids don’t enjoy as much because you are constantly … imparting knowledge and having them learn things and if they don’t learn everything, you don’t even have time to celebrate the successes that they have achieved because you are worried that there are other things they have to know if they are going to do well in an exam. So all my lessons are geared toward exam technique … it’s hard to make it fun for them … it’s hard to make it fun for me!

1:3 acknowledged that Islam was constructed as a homogenous religion and that the dominant tradition, Sunni Islam, was what was presented: ‘That’s absolutely true’. Although the exam syllabus itself talked of ‘some Muslims and most Muslims’:

They never do Sunni or Shia … it’s always some or most, and so they are not getting the details of it at all … when they say “most Muslims believe” they are not even aware that they are talking about Sunni! … I could go to my A* students in year 10 and 11 and ask them what Sunni and Shia is and I am not convinced they would know at all … it’s not something we have ever addressed.

1:3 also agreed that Islam was constructed as something which was ‘static’ rather than fluid or dynamic.

The particular construction of Islam in School 1 had been a factor in the Muslim pupil mentioned above being withdrawn from Religious Education. This pupil had come from a conservative Shia background and had argued that the consensual view of Islam, particularly from a Sunni perspective, differed from the construction of Islam being presented to her by her father.

Teacher 2:1 acknowledged that the Muslim community in the local area in which his school is situated was very diverse, as was the Muslim community in the school, ranging from a secular Muslim of Libyan background, a traditional Muslim of Egyptian background, and a committed Pakistani Muslim who wore the hijab. However, this diversity does not appear to be represented in the construction of Islam at the school. 2:1 agreed that Islam was taught from the dominant Sunni perspective with little appreciation of diversity: ‘That’s a justified criticism’, he said. He also stated that, ‘it
would be good to see the Sunni and Shia division within what they are supposed to know.’

Once again examinations appeared to be the deciding factor in the construction of Islam for educational purposes:

I find myself pulled in two different directions in that one part of me says “I don’t care about exams, that’s not what I am here for, I am here to educate and to get them to think about things in new ways and to facilitate discussion.” … But I am painfully aware that the only thing that allows me to do that is they all know that they are here for a purpose and to get a grade.

What emerges is a construction of Islam which is: ‘very focussed on exam and techniques’ and where, ‘… the writing they do is very focussed on what they need to know’.

2:2 suggested that the exam syllabus itself presented Islam as being homogenous and left little room for constructing Islam as diverse. She, too, highlighted the burden that exam success placed on teachers and its impact on their construction of Islam:

To some extent I would say that I teach to the exam … and there is pressure on us to do that … we are judged on our results … that underpins everything … all the time we have league tables and we are judged by our results it will be so!

2.3, when asked whether she thought that a consensual version of Islam was what was constructed, answered emphatically, ‘Yes!’. She also acknowledged that it was a predominantly Sunni construction. However, she stated that: ‘I do always try to say that some are more liberal, some more traditional’. One of her concerns was a lack of time and a fear of confusing students, hence treating Islam as homogenous:

Given the limited time you want to try to get across … what are the key features of the religion [and so] you have to generalise … otherwise you will end up confusing the students.

2.3 also felt that text books were often guilty of presenting a consensual homogenous construction of Islam and suggested that this was because they are, ‘…trying to make it a simplified version of the religion’ for educational purposes so as not to confuse.
2:4, who was not an RE specialist, acknowledged that he tended to ‘stick with the text books’ which he felt presented Islam as being homogenous and gave little attention to diversity.

In School 3 Islam is not taught as an examination subject. Hence the pressure for good grades which was the case in schools 1 and 2 was not a factor in School 3. However, there still appeared to be little room for diversity in the construction of Islam. Teacher 3:1, the head of department, when asked if Islam was constructed as being fluid and diverse said: ‘No, we don’t touch on that’. When asked if what was presented was a homogenous construction of Islam she stated emphatically: ‘Absolutely!’ The reason that was given was lack of time, and concerns about pupil behaviour and negative stereotyping, and so:

At the end of the day … you pick the best bits – don’t you? … Is there confusion? Yes! Do we tackle it? No! Could we? Yes! Should we? Probably!’

Both 3:2 and 3:3 acknowledged that Islam was constructed as being homogeneous, but felt that this was probably true of the way all religions were constructed at the school, particularly those studied at examination level!

At School 4, where Islam is not taught to examination level, it appeared as though a similar construction of Islam prevailed. Teacher 4:2 acknowledged that a Sunni construction of Islam was what was presented: ‘We don’t even touch upon Sufi or Shia’. The reason given for this was that pupils might become confused if Islam were presented as being diverse: ‘We don’t focus on diversity at all … it becomes too complicated’.

4:2 agreed that a consensual construction of Islam was presented, and suggested that time was also a contributory factor: ‘Yes, absolutely, but I think that is also due to time constraints, but yes we do. It is Sunni Islam’.

At school 5 there appeared to have been more of an attempt to construct Islam as being diverse. 5:1, the head of department, was keen that Islam should not be presented as homogeneous, but agreed that attempts to construct Islam as diverse had not been entirely successful:
… we’ve tried to stay away from even referring to the five pillars because of that, I don’t want people to think of Islam and think “The Five Pillars”, but then again in the Schemes of Work we do cover a number of them so … yes I think that’s a fair point. [i.e. that Islam is presented as being homogenous]

5:1 also agreed that what was presented was a predominantly Sunni construction, largely borne out of a desire not to confuse pupils: ‘Yes … [but] with the higher ability we’ve done a bit about Sufi’.

5:2 agreed that a consensual construction of Islam was presented but went on to suggest that the same was true of other religions: ‘Well, it’s the same in Buddhism, isn’t it?’

At school six 6:1, who had produced the lessons on Islam, acknowledged that it was a predominantly Sunni construction of Islam, although the content analysis did reveal one of the lessons dealt briefly with the differences between Sunni and Shia. Her PowerPoint lessons had been checked for accuracy by a Sunni academic who suggested that the references to Shia be removed! 6:1 had not followed this advice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with respect to homogeneity and diversity, the following emerged: The challenge of public examinations and the desire to achieve good grades was a contributory factor in the way in which Islam was constructed. This, in conjunction with time limitations, led in part to the construction of ‘curriculum Islam’ which presented the Islamic faith as homogenous, lacking diversity, and as being static and devoid of fluidity. Even in those schools where examinations were not a factor a similar construction of Islam was presented. The reasons given for this were limitations of time and a desire not to ‘confuse’ pupils. It will be argued later in this chapter that textbooks and other resources contribute to the homogenous construction of Islam, a point which was raised by teachers in interview. The construction tended to be that of Sunni Islam with little, or no, consideration given to diversity and to other expressions of the faith.
4.2 Pedagogy

4.21 Introduction

A number of issues were raised in the literature relating to pedagogy and construction. These can be summarised thus. First, issues which relate to the justification for the teaching of Religious Education, along with a degree of confusion as to what Religious Education is for. Second, concerns surrounding the teaching of world religions within Religious Education. Third, issues relating to the methods used in the teaching of Religious Education and the perceived dominance of the phenomenological approach. Fourth, whether challenging subjects or conflicting issues of truth are addressed in Religious Education. Fifth, a concern that the teaching of Religious Education was often largely a text book activity, with little room for reflection, empathy or experiential learning. Sixth, concerns about the way in which language is applied and understood: Were the use of word banks, glossaries of terms and word based ‘games’ commonplace? Did this lead to a superficial construction of Islam? Were words and concepts understood in depth, or was there just surface level understanding? Finally, concerns as to whether students are aware of the primary sources of religions? In respect of Islam, are they encouraged to read and analyse the Qur’an or Hadith, or was their understanding of Islam second hand?

4.22 What is Religious Education?

In Chapter 1 the rationale for Religious Education was discussed, and the way in which this rationale evolved from the confessional model following the 1944 act, to one based upon respect and understanding, and most recently the to the promoting of community cohesion. The critique of Zaki (1982) and Noibi (1999), highlighted in the literature review, appears to be based on an outdated notion of what Religious Education is for, with an implied presupposition that its intention is to indoctrinate or denigrate. Hull (1988) is correct in his analysis that such assumptions are based upon a misunderstanding of the purpose of Religious Education.

When asked about his perception as to the importance of Religious Education 1:2 initially suggested that, ‘that’s a tricky one’. On reflection, however, he argued that:
If you ... listen to what religions are getting at, ultimately they are just trying to get people to get on with each other, and I know that many students claim they are the cause of all wars and I often take a little time to point out that it is not religion that is causing the wars but the men who control the religions.

He went on to say that if people really understood what religions were about they would see that they are all, ‘trying to create a peaceful space on the planet,’ it is about ‘tolerance and understanding each other’.

Similar comments were echoed by other teachers across the schools in the sample. 1:3, when asked why he felt Religious Education was important, stated:

Tolerance is a word that comes to mind ... We live in a multi-faith society and it’s increasingly becoming more diverse, and it’s important for kids to know.’

2:4 felt that Religious Education was important because it enables pupils to ‘look at different points of view ... [and to] guard against stereotype’. 3:2, however, did not like the word ‘tolerance’, but she did argue that in her view the purpose of Religious Education was to broaden the minds of pupils:

I think it’s important for young people to learn about other religions and cultures and not just their own, not in order to indoctrinate them in any way but in order to widen their opinions on what other people believe.

This point of view was expressed elsewhere, for example 4:1 reflected that: ‘The purpose of Religious Education is to broaden the mind of young people, to make them aware of how other people in the world live their life.’ Similarly, 6:3 contended that Religious Education was important because, ‘... it’s about the diversity of our world, and the diversity of our daily lives’. It is important that pupils, ‘... learn about cultures and beliefs, and ideas and values of other people in the world’. This, she suggested, was particularly important in a faith school like school 6. Religious Education was about, ‘making them a whole person’.

Teachers also expressed the view that Religious Education enabled pupils to a deeper understanding of self and their place in the world and the universe. Again 4:1 argued that an important element of Religious Education is:
To learn about other people, to learn about yourself, to ask yourself difficult questions that you just don’t come across ... but also to develop personal skills ... and to reflect upon their own world view, and perhaps compare and contrast.

This point was also expressed at school 5 where 5:1 argued that the importance of Religious Education was to help the pupils,

… to understand how other people think, it gives them an opportunity to learn how others live, how they think, why they do it, but also, hopefully, for them to be able to relate it to their own lives, as well.

This teacher also offered an interesting secondary reason for teaching Religious Education in this faith school. For her Religious Education was also important as a ‘guide’ for pupils, ‘when it’s appropriate’. At the other faith school in the sample a similar view was expressed, 6:1 offered the view that Religious Education was important in her view from a faith perspective, enabling students to, ‘understand and know their faith and why we do certain things’, and also from the perspective of ‘the academics of Religious Studies, and actually learning how and why people do differing things, understanding and learning from different ways of ... perceiving the world’. Similarly 6:2 contended that the importance of Religious Education in a Catholic school lay in the,

… development of them as a person ... and their own beliefs and their own faith, and with a Catholic school we guide them in the gospel values ... but we very much don’t force it on them.

Religious Education, she suggested, was also important in order to help pupils to an ‘understanding of spirituality, an understanding of the world around us.’

In contrast, 5:3 argued that the importance of Religious Education was two-fold. It was both, ‘getting the children to think and to consider other peoples’ perspectives’ in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. Secondly, it is important as a subject because it encourages pupils to reflect on life’s big issues: ‘What does strike me is a lot of them do not spend much time at all thinking about the big issues of life, and so that is what we are trying to do in RE.’

Teachers reflected on the importance of some of the issues which were discussed in Religious Education for pupils’ later development and understanding. This was particularly true at those schools which taught the Edexcel exam syllabus. 2:1, for example, believed that Religious Education was ‘incredibly important’ because ‘it
touches on so many fields of human experience’, which students will encounter in their adult life, such as sex, divorce, the environment, voting. 2:2 agreed that Religious Education was important because the issues which are discussed will be extremely relevant to pupils throughout their lives, ‘what they are going to come up against in everyday life when they leave school ... from the environment to issues like abortion, relationships social skills’.

Teachers expressed the view that the importance of Religious Education is further enhanced because it taught transferrable skills as well as being ideal in promoting cross curricular understanding. This was most obvious at School 3, where Religious Education is taught as part of a wider humanities brief. However, at School 1, 1:3 also argued that Religious Education was ‘very important’ because,

... through RE students are given the opportunity to consolidate things that they learn in history and practice English, and obviously citizenship is very important in RE ... Most of the topics we teach in the subject ... All have curriculum units.

2:3 contended that Religious Education is ‘really important’ because it,

... offers a lot of skills that are cross curricular and that you don’t necessarily get in other subjects ... like learning to argue effectively but without causing offence to the people you are arguing against.

She also argued that it teaches ‘a level of empathy and understanding with other peoples’ beliefs, whether they are religious beliefs or not’, and that the skills are important in life to be able to ‘accept someone else’s points of view and to be able to oppose it where you don’t agree’.

2:2 also reflected on the importance of Religious Education in imparting transferable skills to pupils: ‘They learn how to debate and discuss, how to express themselves and their opinions.’ She argued that this does not tend to happen elsewhere in the curriculum because ‘a lot of their learning is factual teaching’.

4.23 The World Religions Approach

The literature had suggested a number of issues arising out of concerns surrounding the “world religions” approach in Religious Education. At the heart of these concerns was
the potential that the world religions approach might lead to confusion or misunderstanding. Kay and Linnet Smith (2002) had argued that pupils were more likely to confuse or misunderstand religions if there had been an attempt to study five or six of the major world religions. This would appear to support the argument of Zaki (1982), that confusion is likely to occur if the curriculum is overloaded with six world religions, but is also an implied critique of the National Framework and Model Syllabuses which had argued that pupils should have encountered all six major world religions by the end of Key Stage 3. Zaki had also suggested that religion dealt with abstract ideas which were difficult for the teacher to teach and for the pupil to learn. Hunt (1983) disagreed and suggested that whilst Religious Education dealt with abstract ideas, teachers are well equipped to deal with this. He did however suggest that only a maximum of three world religions should be taught.

Although only one of the teachers in the sample, 3:1, was aware of the research of Kay and Linnet-Smith, teachers acknowledged the potential for confusion when a number of world religions are studied. This was particularly the case at those schools where all six principle religions were taught. For example, at school 1, where all six world religions are studied (in addition to Rastafarianism), 1:1 was aware that pupils often become confused:

They do actually get confused ... because we have so much time for Religious Studies in Key Stage 3, one lesson a week, but the lessons are 1 hour 40 and that’s a lot of time for Religious Studies, so we have a double edged sword because we’ve got to fill the time ... but as a consequence we can get a lot more done [for this reason] ... we do cover the six world religions and the kids ... particularly get confused between Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus.

This teacher also acknowledged that this confusion was further enhanced by the application of a thematic approach, which was adopted at this school.

At school 2 there was also an acknowledgement that pupils often became confused between different religions. 2:3 stated that pupils,

‘... do get confused, particularly between Hinduism and Buddhism ... and to some extent between Islam and Christianity ... they always compare. You give them a question like: “What is the Qur’an?” Looking for the answer, “the Muslim holy book.” And they say, “Oh, the Muslim Bible.”’
2:4 reflected that there was more confusion at Key Stage 4 when pupils were studying for the Edexcel examination. Here, he argued, pupils mixed up Christianity or Islam with religions that they had studied lower down in the school. Teacher 2:1, the head of department, had inherited the choice of Islam and Christianity for the Edexcel examination and suggested that this was because his predecessor had thought it easier because of the similar response in these faiths to the themes raised in the exam syllabus. He wondered whether this similarity was in fact the *cause* of confusion.

At school 3 teacher 3:1, though aware of the study by Kay and Linnet-Smith, did not appear to think that confusion was an issue at this school. Similarly 3:2 and 3:3 did not think confusion among pupils was an issue. In this school 4 of the principle world religions are studied, the exceptions being Judaism and Sikhism. This appeared to support Kay and Linnet-Smith (2002) who had argued that this was the optimum number that should be studied in order to avoid pupil confusion. 3:2 argued that pupils did not become confused, ‘... because it’s not taught by themes’. However, there appeared to be some inconsistency here. The same teacher acknowledged that, ‘... sometimes they have referred to Gandhi as Christian, because he is taught alongside Martin Luther King.’ This would suggest not only confusion, but confusion caused by a thematic approach.

Asked whether studying a number of world religions led to confusion among pupils at school four, 4:1 was emphatic in responding: ‘Yes, absolutely’. He went on to comment that:

> Year 10’s sat the first half of their GCSE last week and they haven’t done any Islam since year 8 ... and they are still getting Hinduism and Islam mixed up ... I don’t know the reason for the confusion.

He wondered whether it might be the result of a thematic study of religions:

> We kind of mix it up at key stage three ... We will look at a religion maybe for one unit, and the unit after may be about suffering and so then we will kind of reference a couple of religions in relation to that, we might look at symbolism and how different religions might use symbols, and the unit after that might be “world religions” and the class might be divided up so that different groups will look at different religions.

He further reflected whether the confusion might be the result of the prevalence of stories about Islam in the media and that pupils ‘just get their wires crossed’.
4:2 was similarly emphatic that pupils become confused about the beliefs of different world religions, often incorrectly identifying particular beliefs with particular religions. This teacher, who happened to be a Hindu of Indian parentage, suggested an interesting potential racial element to this confusion:

Kids tend to think that all brown people are Muslim, so even if we haven’t been looking at Islam in year 9 or year 10, and we have a practice test, ... they always refer to the Hindu text as the Qur’an ... They get Hinduism and Islam mixed up all the time ... They tend to lump Eastern religions as one ... Some of them get confused with Buddhism because there is no leader, no head like the Pope, they definitely get confused with different types of Christianity, really confused ... But they do get confused with Islam and Hinduism.

At school 5 all six principle world religions are studied in at Key Stage 3. 5:1 acknowledged that there was a potential for some confusion:

The most obvious, most common confusions are things like knowing the key places of worship, or holy books, they get confused in those areas.

At the same time she reflected that it was difficult to determine to what extent pupils are confused because once end of module assessments have taken place, the religions are not revisited, and at Key Stage 4 only Christianity is studied. Teacher 5:2 argued that there is a degree of confusion among pupils particularly, she suggested, among lower ability pupils who appear to ‘get really confused with Buddhism and Hinduism’. She also reflected that even in the upper school, where pupils only study Christianity, they still get the beliefs of Christianity confused with those of other religions. In respect of Islam she suggested that sometimes pupils confuse the role of Muhammad: ‘He gets confused with Jesus quite a bit, and also a common mistake that they think he is God’. Sometimes pupils confused Islamic festivals with Hindu festivals, as well as some key beliefs: ‘I think they get mixed up in the key beliefs, definitely ... Life after death, and how a religion started’, were cited as particular areas of confusion.

5:3 acknowledged that pupils sometimes get confused: ‘Yes they do ... it’s amazing that some kids in year 10 ... still aren’t sure who has only one god’.

At school 6 both 6:1 and 6:2 conceded that pupils often became confused, particularly between Judaism and Christianity. 6:2 suggested that students were occasionally confused with regard to Christianity and Islam, particularly when the role of Jesus as a
prophet within Islam is discussed. She reflected that pupils had some difficulty when the various ‘links’ between religions came up.

6:3 was very aware of pupils confusing different religions and their beliefs:

Yes, all the time all the time, and I think because we do it in years 7, 8 and 9 [world religions] they tend to carry that through and so when we get to year 9 and we speak of Islam ... often they refer back to Hinduism, and then they are not quite sure whether it is Yahweh or Allah.

4.24 Methods employed in the teaching of Religious Education

With the exception of one teacher in the sample, 3:1, all acknowledged the dominance of the phenomenological approach, either throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, or at Key Stages 3 or 4 alone. Alongside this a thematic approach, often associated with phenomenology, frequently prevailed. For example the head of department in school 2, teacher 2:1, acknowledged that at Key Stage 3 the dominant pedagogical approach was phenomenological and thematic. At Key Stage 4, however, he suggested that the approach tended to be ‘issues based’. This, he argued, was because at Key Stage 4 teachers were ‘responding to those outside influences’, by which he was referring to the GCSE examination. A similar picture emerged in school 1. Teacher 1:1 acknowledged that at Key Stage 3 the teaching of Religious Education was thematic. However, at this key stage teachers were able to use a variety of teaching styles and pupils were encouraged to express themselves. She described her own particular style as ‘mixed methods’. She rarely used text books at this key stage, and tended to use far more by way of multimedia. This teacher also included more creative activities such as stilling exercises and creative design. At Key Stage 4 this changed because, she suggested, the examination syllabus determined the teaching method. It appeared as though a thematic approach was also prevalent at this key stage, with the themes being determined by the issues to be studied. Asked whether the dominant pedagogy at Key Stage 4 was issues based and thematic teacher 1:2 exclaimed, ‘without a doubt’, adding that this resulted from the way the syllabus was set up. He suggested that other teaching methods which might be more innovative fell by the wayside: ‘You can’t do that ... You could do that at Key Stage 3 ... [but] I don’t know if that would help at GCSE level’. At school 2 teacher 2:2 appeared to agree with this conclusion. She suggested that the way in which she
taught word ‘vary from group to group’ and would also be dependent upon ability. However, when it came to Key Stage 4 it was always the exam itself ‘which is the guiding principle’. She went on to argue that it is quite clear that the pedagogy is thematic by the time it gets to the GCSE arguing that it is ‘by nature thematic’. However she did stress that she used a lot of discussion in teaching at GCSE: ‘I tend to let the girls take it where they want to go ... to some extent ... within the boundaries of the syllabus’. This discursive approach was also adopted by 2:1. He argued that by the time they begin working on the GCSE many pupils are beginning to question why they have to study Religious Education. Much of the first term, he suggested, is spent trying to get them to understand that doing a GCSE in Religious Education is a good thing. It is ‘just a good subject where we discuss lots of things’. He even suggested that: ‘In some cases it’s just forgetting that it is RE’.

As a newly qualified teacher 2:3 felt that she was, ‘still trying to find my overall style’. On the whole she argued that she ‘tended to stick to safer options ... [such as] question and answer, putting yourself in somebody else’s shoes, write a postcard’. She did however acknowledge that her overall method was thematic, as did 2:4.

3:1 was somewhat ambivalent as to the dominant pedagogy employed at her school. She suggested that it was very much ‘mix and match’, and that her own methodology was, ‘systematic – I think ... it’s very much: “this is a religion we are studying”’. This teacher was not favourable to the phenomenological approach and appeared to be alarmed that her method might be considered to be phenomenological: ‘I hope I am not phenomenological’, she exclaimed. Similarly she was also keen to stress that neither was her method experiential, and suggested that the reason for this was partly out of a concern over what parents might think. She wanted pupils to understand the faith of another but, ‘... I wouldn’t want it to be a walk in the shoes. I want the students to be critical, I don’t want it to be a presentation of a faith as a given’. Teachers 3:2 and 3:3 were very unclear as to the dominant teaching methods they employed although they thought that they probably adopted ‘mixed methods’. 3:2 commented that:

It ends up feeling you have a certain amount to teach and you just kind of stick to the syllabus and go through the lesson plans you’ve been told, and you don’t really reflect on how you are putting that across.
This suggested that the construction of Islam and the methods used in the teaching of Islam were dependent upon syllabuses, schemes of work, and lesson plans. At this school these tended to be produced by the head of department.

At school 4 teachers were keen to stress that Religious Education was not taught in a thematic way at Key Stage 3. Rather it is subject based with pupils studying a different religion each term. This appeared to contradict 4:1’s earlier assertion that suggested that the cause of pupil confusion might be the thematic approach employed at this key stage. 4:2 suggested that Religious Education was, ‘becoming more experiential’ at Key Stage 3, although 4:1 did not entirely agree. Whilst acknowledging that he adopted an empathetic approach (‘to put yourself in someone else’s shoes ... is a vital part of RS’) he suggested that for him the experiential approach remains little more than an aspiration. It is something that he would love to do but: ‘Time is an issue, because we only teach RS one hour a week’. This allows for little more experiential work other than ‘basic stilling exercises in relation to meditation.’

Both teachers acknowledged that at Key Stage 4, when pupils are studying for the GCSE, teaching tends to be thematic and issues based. Islam is not taught at this school at Key Stage 4.

At school 5 teacher 5:1 acknowledged that a thematic approach was dominant. In so far as experiential teaching is concerned:

We don’t particularly use much experiential stuff ... Not against it if it seems appropriate ... but we stick more with the more traditional video, discussion, tasks.

In contrast to this 5:2 commented that their recent Ofsted report had highlighted that the inspectors wanted to see more, ‘active learning styles [and] diversity in the classroom’. She felt that the methods’ at this school were changing, suggesting that Religious Education used to be, ‘Sit in silence and copy from a text book’. Now it is much more question and answer and discussion based: ‘Now I think we are trying to incorporate more variety ... and more experiential learning’.

5:3 expressed concerns about the thematic approach which she acknowledged was normative at school 5:
I sometimes wonder if it wouldn’t be interesting for them to have more opportunities to make links between religions rather than each in isolation ... What worries me a little bit when I look at the assessment for learning focus sheets [A1 and A2] the way we teach it doesn’t actually help them to aspire to those levels seven and eight ... because they are expected to make links and comparisons and we are not actually teaching it like that ... we are teaching it in isolation.

At the same time this same teacher felt that an experiential methodology was even more problematic. She argued that this could lead to, ‘overstepping the bounds’. Often, she suggested, the experiential approach was, ‘irrelevant ... because it is just part of a whole world view and unless you are buying into that world view that has no meaning.’

At School 6 teacher 6:1 believed that a ‘mixed methods’ approach was generally applied at the school, and the particular method used would be dependent upon pupils ability. However, 6:2 suggested that the structure of Religious Education at the school was dominated by the phenomenological approach and was thematic in nature: ‘Yes, very much so!’ Similarly, 6:3 acknowledged the dominance of a thematic approach based upon phenomenology.

Many teachers commented on the two attainment targets for religious studies A1 (learning about religion) and A2 (learning from religion), which derived from the 1994 model syllabuses. Teacher 1:2 was not alone in suggesting that A:2 was, ‘very difficult to achieve’. He suggested that:

There is really only one thing you have to get over to them and that is the idea of a spiritual dimension to life, and if you can get that idea across to certain students then the learning from religion is a lot easier to do, but if after a couple of years of teaching they just don’t get it, then it is difficult.’

He also argued that it is difficult, even ‘bizarre’, talking to the students about the religious experiences that people have had throughout history when they are,

... sitting in a classroom with their mates, with all the other distractions, to make them think that there is something else out there is tricky [after all] ... monks spend their lives sat in isolation meditating on something and achieve that spiritual realization, we are being graded on our ability to give it to kids in an hour or two slot.’
Similarly teacher 2:3 acknowledged the difficulty in achieving A:2, arguing that ‘learning from’ gets pushed to the side because there ‘is a lot of content I want to get across’. She suggested that she attempts to achieve A:2 by asking empathetic questions.

At school 3 teacher 3:2 suggested that it was difficult to assess A:2: ‘I don’t think you can really assess it, I don’t think you can have a written assessment’. Nonetheless she felt that ‘learning from’ will often happen, ‘without it becoming explicit.’ On this point 3:3 was in agreement. She suggested that one was ‘learning from’ when dealing with concepts such as, for example, the sanctity of life. She did not however feel that it was ‘fair’ to assess this. This latter point was perhaps highlighted by 3:1, who stated that in relation to A:2: ‘We’ve tried to bring in some assessments for that’. These largely consisted of critical reflections tasks. However, ‘some staff have been quite anti towards it, they have not embraced it’. This had been, ‘very frustrating’ and has caused ‘some grief’.

4:1 argued that the way in which he sought to fulfil A:2 was through empathetic tasks, although he acknowledged that some pupils found this difficult. Interestingly in his experience it was often the higher ability pupils who struggled most:

It is interesting, some of the ... higher level pupils struggle with it a little bit ... some can and some can’t and academic ability doesn’t really reflect whether someone can feel empathy or not.

Indeed, this teacher argued that for some of the lower ability pupils empathetic learning can be, ‘the way in for them’.

The difficulty which teachers experience with A:2 was further expressed at school 5. Teacher 5:2 acknowledged that it was, ‘quite hard’. She suggested that:

I think mainly you do it from life experiences ... what have you learnt from this, and this is how their life would be ... that is how you make it accessible to them .. to show the impact on how it would be if you were a Muslim.. living in this society.

5:1 argued that A:2 was achieved partly through the tasks which pupils are given throughout the lesson. Additionally, she suggested:
The most obvious one is every lesson we start off with a starter question, or something like that and more often than not that will fit into the ‘learning from’ religion, and then you build on that throughout the lesson.

A content analysis of the text books used in the schools in the sample reveal that they are themselves dominated by a phenomenological and thematic approach to the study of religion. The Edexcel syllabus is itself, as teachers suggested, based around a series of themes which students explore by looking at the response of Christianity and one other religion (in the case of schools 1 and 2, Islam) to those themes. The very syllabus itself, therefore, leads to a thematic study. It could be said that the locally agreed syllabuses within the sample, whilst generally vague as to the content that should be studied, appear to presuppose that a thematic approach will be taken. Clearly the Schemes of Work, based upon the syllabuses, tend to be both phenomenological and thematic.

4.25 Issues of truth

Philip Barnes argued that the phenomenological approach to the teaching of Religious Education has led to an over emphasis on the role of ‘experience’. This he argues assumes that the essence of all religions is the same, and ignores rival truth claims. This approach, suggests Barnes, is born out of a desire to advance toleration and respect for difference, but in actuality achieves neither. Furthermore, he contends that the phenomenological approach leads to a misrepresentation of religion in which religions are constructed so as not to cause offence (Barnes, 2001; 2006). Zaki (1982) had similarly claimed that a child who was taught that all religions are equally valuable is far more likely to conclude that they are all equally valueless. Ofsted (2007) had suggested that the controversial in religion is often ignored in Religious Education, so as not to cause offence.

Teachers responded to these assertions in a variety of ways. Perhaps most controversially teacher 1:2 disagreed totally with Barnes’ thesis concerning competing truth claims. Rather, he argued that all religions were in essence the same. They are after all, ‘after the same things’. He went on to say that:

I would disagree with him. I would say that they are like political parties, ultimately after the same thing ... after redemption of man, trying to find the right path in life.
He went on to argue that students also regarded all religions as the same, ‘except Rastafarians because they smoke weed, or Buddhists because they are cool’.

In contrast, 1:3, a teacher at the same school, reflected that:

It is a very easy trap to fall into when you are trying to encourage toleration ... to ... highlight the common things ... the commonalities between them to show that we are not that different, trying to encourage inclusion and work that’s diverse, but we are kind of all the same, but you can almost do that to the expense of the religion itself because there are some very fundamental differences between other faiths and so to suggest, or let students think ... that actually they are all the same ... wouldn’t be fair you are doing a terrible disservice to all religions if you were to suggest that they are all the same.

This teacher felt that a balance needed to be struck between tackling competing issues of truth in classroom, but at the same time seeking not to demonise any particular religion. He did feel however that ‘issues of truth’ were largely ignored: ‘I don’t think we tackle them as much as we could do and perhaps should do, but I do understand the reasons why’. He felt that there was a danger that tackling issues of truth, ‘could be divisive and unproductive’.

Conversely the head of department at this school, teacher 1:1, suggested that they did tackle both ‘issues of truth’ and the controversial, particularly in the GCSE, which covered topics such as birth control, and war and peace. She did, however, concede that this was often only a very superficial level: ‘I suppose we shy away from that’ just concentrating on them ‘in a sort of factual way’.

In reflecting on the Edexcel GCSE course teacher 2:1 argued that it did have a tendency to suggest that religions often ‘overlap’ and are the same. Controversial issues were not, he offered, ignored. Indeed he argued that: ‘Students are always interested to talk about differing attitudes about, for example, who gets saved’. He did, however, acknowledge that competing issues of truth and the controversial were sometimes handled in an, ‘oblique way’.

Teacher 2:3 believed that it was important to discuss controversial issues. She had recently taught a lesson looking at the difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims and had attempted to, ‘guide them through to think about suicide bombers’ in order to emphasise the concept of martyrdom in Shia Islam and then to ask, ‘What type of
Muslim would be more likely to be a suicide bomber?’ And to reflect upon whether all Shia were likely to be suicide bombers. She felt that this was important because of the representation of Islam in the media, where they are constantly presented with the horror of suicide bombers.

Teacher 3:1 stressed that controversial issues were tackled: ‘We have no choice ... because of the comments in our lessons ... we get challenged in a way that history teachers don’t’. She went on to argue that issues like ‘Jihad’ had to be tackled and both ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ Jihad reflected upon because of the way in which the media suggested that the term only referred to ‘holy war’. This would suggest that controversial issues are tackled in respect of Islam as a result of pupil and media pressure. She also acknowledged that there was a danger in stressing just the potentially positive aspects of Islam:

If you harp on too much [that] Islam means submission and peace, and that Muslims are peaceful and that they pray a lot and then a student says, ‘What about ...’ If you are not careful you lie!

She also suggested that pupils knew whether you were misleading, they are able to find out in the media or on the Internet.

In so far as issues of truth are concerned 3:1 suggested that she would deal with these if that they came up in a lesson, but: ‘I certainly wouldn’t plan a lesson around it’.

3:2 agreed with Barnes thesis that competing issues of truth were largely ignored. She acknowledged that: ‘We shy away from them’. And whilst conceding that maybe this should not be the case, she reflected that what tended to be given at school 3 was what she called a ‘sugary’ version of all religions.

Teacher 3:3, on the other hand, argued for the importance of tackling competing issues of truth and the controversial in religion. This teacher, who had been brought up a Muslim, gave an example of a lesson she had taught in which she showed a film in which extreme Christian fundamentalists were arguing that all homosexuals should be put to death. She used this film as a focus for debate. In respect of religious truth she argued that:
I think it needs to be done, because these kids are being taught that all Christians are ultra tolerant because they follow Jesus’ example ... And I think they need to be told.

At school 4, in responding to Barnes, 4:1 reflected that teachers should tackle competing truth claims. He suggested that: ‘We do, to a certain extent’. However he went on to acknowledge that such an approach was less likely to be adopted in respect of Islam:

‘I personally tend to challenge Christianity more than I do Islam, maybe because it’s a kind of comfort zone for me ... I am very careful about [not] doing that with Islam.’

This suggested that Islam was being treated differently for fear of causing offence to the Muslim community. In so far as controversial issues and Islam were concerned, 4:1 acknowledged that this was rarely covered, they talked a little about the hijab, terrorism was tackled to some extent, but only because it was brought up by pupils, ‘ ... but we don’t really focus on it’. Basically, he said, ‘we focus on the [Five] Pillars’.

Likewise teacher 4:2 was clear in her assertion that insofar as competing religious truths are concerned, ‘we ignore them’. She argued that this was particularly true when dealing with Islam because of the desire to counter the negative portrayal of Islam in the media. This teacher found the whole issue of religious truth fascinating. She felt it was a really tough thing to achieve because it raised questions about how you could explore issues of religious truth, and at what stage: ‘But again we are so constrained by time, and having to teach certain things and in a certain order [which meant] you cannot get to those important questions of religious truth’.

This teacher also suggested that the way in which the exam syllabus was set up perpetuates a particular method of teaching whereby religions are not studied in respect of competing issues of truth, rather the response of Christianity and one other religion to certain ‘issues’.

At school five teacher 5:1 suggested that, ‘we try to’ address competing issues of truth but, ‘it mostly comes back to comparing it to Christian beliefs and ideas’. Teacher 5:2 argued that issues of truth were not tackled in the lower school, which is where all of the world religions is taught at this school, ‘because it’s too complex an issue’. In the upper school, she suggested: ‘We do actually look at religious truth and we talk about how this
is true for that religion and then we talk a little bit about that’. This appeared to be a little superficial.

5:3 was in agreement with Barnes hypothesis and argued that Religious Education did not address conflicting issues of truth. She went on to argue that:

I think we are kind of doing kids a disservice actually, if we are saying all religions teach love, kindness and ... be good to dogs ... Occasionally a kid has picked up and said ... “Well ... Muslims believe on the last day this will happen, Christians believe on the last day this will happen, and is there going to be like a big fight to see who is right?” And what he had really picked up on is they teach conflicting things ... Sadly ... I just said that, “You have picked up on an important point that religions teach different things, but we haven’t really got time.” ... But I thought, “Yes, he has got a point.” And perhaps we do have a duty, but we are so concerned not to ... you know we’ve got to be tolerant ... we’ve got to kind of minimize the differences and promote diversity and all this ... I think we have gone too far the other way, they are confused, they don’t know what the distinctions are so how are they going to make up their own minds?”

At school six teacher 6:1 reflected that they did deal with issues of truth: ‘We do actually ... we do a unit of work on it’. However, in conversation it appeared as though this teacher was not reflecting on the same phenomenon as Barnes. Rather the unit of work to which she was referring appeared to consist of a study of certain concepts, like heaven and hell, and not what Barnes would call conflicting issues of truth. In respect of controversial issues and the controversial nature of religion in society 6:1 acknowledged that this had found its way into GCSE syllabuses. However, she felt that the way the syllabuses dealt with these issues was ‘quite woolly’ and that they were only dealt with superficially, and only then in relation to social harmony rather than significant issues.

6:2 acknowledged that she tended to shy away from potentially controversial issues, not least when teaching Islam, for fear of parental complaint. When asked whether difficult issues were avoided she commented that: ‘I think to an extent we probably do’. She felt that this was particularly true in areas where teachers did not feel totally confident or competent. In relation to the teaching of competing issues of truth within religion this teacher stated that: ‘I think it would be brilliant to be able to teach it like that’. However she reflected that this was not her experience of how Religious Education was currently taught: ‘It would be fascinating and challenging to be able to teach it by looking at the truths behind religion’. She thought that it would be interesting to be able to say to non
Muslim pupils that from a Muslim perspective: ‘You are going to hell’, and felt that this would engender a lively debate. At the same time she commented that this would be problematic from the point of view of the syllabus and what was expected of pupils: ‘I don’t know to what ... benefit it would be for them in what they need to know to tick the boxes ... for the syllabus’.

6:3 argued that it was the difficult and controversial issues that pupils enjoyed the most. She felt that teachers should encourage discussions on these issues rather than ignore them. However when asked if she ever shied away from the difficult or controversial she acknowledged that she sometimes did: ‘Certainly I have found myself feeling a little defensive ... I don’t shy away from it but feel at times as though my subject knowledge wasn’t as it should have been’.

4.26 A text book based activity?

Kay and Linnet Smith (2002) showed that in their sample the most common activity in Religious Education was using a text book, work sheet or reference book. From the perspective of the pupil Religious Education was primarily a text based activity with very little ‘adventurousness’.

Interviews, schemes of work, lesson plans and lesson observations suggested that within the present sample text books were most frequently, though not exclusively, used at Key Stage 4 for the purpose of public examinations. In those schools where Islam was only taught at Key Stage 3 (Schools 3; 4; 5 and 6) text books tended to be used only to introduce a topic or at the plenary stage by way of revision. Lessons at this level tended to be more activity based and less text book based. This contrasted sharply with Key Stage 4 where, in Schools 1 and 2, students were studying for the Edexcel GCSE. For this purpose the most common text books used were those specifically written for the Edexcel exam by Victor Watton. Comments in interviews with teachers at Schools 1 and 2 were confirmed in the lessons observed of GCSE lessons where this text book was used extensively, and Religious Education appeared to be a text based activity. The comments of teacher 1:1, noted elsewhere, namely that it was ‘bog standard get the text books out, here’s some notes, let’s do some “key words” let’s answer some exam questions’, were borne out by observations.
Teacher 1:2 confessed that the Islam lessons at Key Stage 4 were primarily a text based activity, suggesting that a reason for this was a lack of time: ‘We have got such reduced time that you haven’t scope to do much else, you have to pretty much follow the text book’. He went on to argue that because the emphasis in education was on gaining good exam results: ‘You are not really learning about religions, you are just giving text book responses to religious beliefs’.

Teacher 1:3 described the Watton text books as ‘mind numbing’ and argued that, ‘Victor Watton focuses quite a lot on the similarities [between Christianity and Islam], so what’s the point?’ For the students ‘it is not an enriching experience’.

Teacher 2:1 described the Watton text books as ‘our mainstay’, arguing that because it is endorsed by the exam board it is ‘telling us what the exam board thinks we need to know’ and so it would be ‘foolish to ignore them for this reason’. From the evidence of classroom observation the teaching of Islam at Key Stage 4 at this school appears to be primarily text book based, although there is also a great deal of dialogue and discussion among pupils and teachers.

Teacher 2:2, whilst using the Watton text, found it to be ‘tedious … making it very difficult to do anything innovative’. This teacher also used a great deal of discussion, based upon the text book, and on newspapers and film.

An analysis of the observations carried out in the schools within the sample revealed that many of the lessons were primarily text based activities. Lessons were observed in five of the six schools in the sample.

Two lessons were observed in school 1. Both of these were Key Stage 4 GCSE Edexcel lessons on the theme of peace and conflict. In both lessons Watton’s Religion and Society was used extensively. In both lessons there was a great deal of teacher input, getting pupils to copy from the board, particularly ‘Key Words’ and their definitions in preparation for the examination. In one of the lessons pupils were also given a worksheet on peace and conflict. This also began with a series of key words and definitions, although many of the words were not religious but technical words connected with the theme.
In one of the lessons there was a plenary which was entitled: ‘How to answer an exam question’, and was focussed on the key word questions in the Edexcel exam and how one could get the best mark.

The observations largely confirmed what teachers had said in interview. Islam at Key Stage 4 is a text book based activity. The text books that are used have been specifically written for the Edexcel syllabus and so the temptation appears to be to ‘teach’ students the content of the book in the hope that this would ensure a good mark. At interview teachers had reflected that this was not an enriching experience, either for them, or for pupils. This appeared to be confirmed by observation. Few pupils appeared to be engaged in the lessons. In one lesson a pupil groaned and exclaimed: ‘Miss, I want to do Rastafarians,’ a topic they had previously studied at Key Stage 3.

At School 2 three lessons were observed. One of these was a Key Stage 3 lesson on the Hajj. The lesson plan suggested that this would be a lesson dominated by the use of text book and worksheet, but there would also be a DVD and some pupil tasks. In the lesson itself, however, the DVD was not shown, in the main because the DVD player was broken. The lesson itself was dominated by use of a text book by Sue Penney (analysed in 4.3), copying from the board, and a worksheet activity. There was very little pupil-teacher dialogue. The worksheet activity asked the pupils to order the Hajj pilgrimage from the clues on the worksheet. They were asked to copy questions and answers from the board into their books, and then answer questions from their text books. The final exercise was to write a postcard as though they had been on the Hajj, but very few of the pupils managed to get as far as this task.

The two further lessons observed at this school were Key Stage 4 lessons. Both of the classes were preparing for the Edexcel GCSE. One lesson was based upon the Five Pillars of Islam and was text book and worksheet dominated. Although there was classroom discussion, the main task consisted of a worksheet in which pupils were asked to write down definitions to key words connected with Islam. They could either do this from memory, or by looking them up in a glossary of terms at the back of their text books.
The final lesson at this school was a general revision of Islam in preparation for the examination. This provided the focus for the tasks. The lesson included a great deal of reading from the text book, and copying from the board. Some of the lesson was given over to looking at ‘model answers’ to exam questions, very standardized formulas which were written on the board to be copied down by pupils. There was a sense that the students became gradually disinterested. At one point a student exclaimed: ‘I’m bored’.

At School 3 the final year 7 lesson on Islam was observed. Pupils were completing a project which consisted of turning a floor plan of a church into a mosque, which was then peer assessed at the end of the lesson. Each pupil was given a copy of Aylett and O’Donnell’s *The Muslim Experience* from which they were expected to research the names of various parts of the Mosque, but the lesson was not dominated by text books. This was a varied lesson in which pupils were engaged and which they really appeared to enjoy.

Two lessons were observed at School 4. Both of these lessons were on the theme of the Hajj and were introductory lessons to a large scale project which pupils undertake resulting in them completing a ‘Hajj’ board game. The first of these lessons had a variety of tasks and activities. This included a series of PowerPoint slides depicting different ‘special places’, some of which were secular (Wembley Stadium, a sunny beach) whilst others were distinctly religious (Lourdes, The Holy Sepulchre). This opened up the whole concept of special places and, eventually, pilgrimage. Pupils were then given a worksheet to complete which was a Hajj itinerary which was gradually filled in as the students watched clips of the *Belief File* film on the Hajj, which was shown at various stages of the lesson. Pupils appeared to enjoy this varied lesson.

The second lesson at this school followed a similar pattern with an introductory activity which consisted of pictures of ‘special places’. Pupils were also asked to fill in the Hajj itinerary, but in this lesson the activity was less interactive. Instead of the film pupils were asked to fill in the worksheet after looking at a series of still pictures, many of which were too obscure for pupils to make a connection (e.g. a suitcase, a Burka, a passport). As a result pupils tended to be disengaged and a little disruptive.
Two lessons were observed at School 5. Both lessons were on the Qur’an and were given to year 9 pupils. In neither lesson were text books used. Indeed in both lessons a number of different activities took place, including a quiz, a PowerPoint presentation, a ‘Mastermind’ activity, and worksheets. In both classes there was a great deal of pupil-teacher interaction and the pupils seemed to enjoy the lesson.

Analysis of schemes of work and lesson plans would suggest that in all of the schools, excepting School 6, text books are used widely, even in those schools where observation of an individual lesson suggested otherwise. At Key Stage 4 at both Schools 1 and 2 the entire course is dominated by the text books by Victor Watton and, although there is a great deal of teacher pupil dialogue in both schools, the dominance of the text book is always evident. At Key Stage 3 at School 2, where Islam is also taught, the scheme of work suggests that there is a great deal of text book activity in each lesson. Pupils are frequently required to read large sections of text and complete a task based upon it. There are worksheets in some of the lessons, and occasional audio Visual material.

In School 3, where the head of department had concerns about text books and suggested that they were not used, text books, along with worksheets, appear to feature quite extensively from the evidence of the lesson plans. A similar picture emerges at School 5.

Only at school six were text books not used. This school used its own resources, which consisted of a series of PowerPoint slides. Nonetheless these took the place of text books and the PowerPoint presentations appeared to dominate each lesson.

4.27 The use of word banks and word based activities

Homan (2004) is critical of the use of ‘word banks’ and glossaries of terms, which often give short and potentially misleading definitions of words. He argued for more expansive definitions. The glossary approach, he argues, tends to shy away from the controversial and definitions of words are given so as to cause little offence. He is concerned with who decides on a ‘correct’ definition of a word, and argues that word banks, crosswords, word bingo and the like do not allow for expansive definitions.

Within the sample ‘word banks’ and other word based activities were commonplace. In the context of the Edexcel syllabus great stress was laid upon understanding ‘key
words’ for the examination. The related text books by Victor Watton also contain key words with definitions. As we have seen the stress upon the learning of key words along with simple definitions was evident in the lesson observations undertaken at schools 1 and 2, where the Edexcell syllabus was undertaken. Teacher 1:1 argued that this was necessary because of the exam. When asked how this approach enabled students to move from a passive ‘dictionary’ understanding of a word to a more active and reflective understanding she argued that: ‘I don’t think we can get past it under the current exam system’. This teacher also felt that there was no time to give more expansive definitions of controversial words and concepts: ‘If I had to discuss every one of those key words that would have been the whole lesson gone’. Similarly teacher 1:2 acknowledged that word based activities were frequently used in the school. He laid great stress on the learning of Key Words for the examination. This was useful because: ‘You get marks for key words’ and ‘if you have got a few key words under your belt you are going to be able to get some marks’. He did, however, acknowledge the limitations that this approach presents, arguing that this was caused by the examination:

The [Key Words] show the inflexibility of the exam … because students learn them in different ways, you can have some who have a genuine spiritual understanding [but] have difficulty remembering and regurgitating key terms and so ultimately may do worse in an RE exam when they maybe [have] a more spiritual understanding.

At Key Stage 4, along with his other colleagues, teacher 1:3 laid great stress on the teaching of key words for the examination: ‘It’s just key words – learn the definition’. When it comes to the exam, he suggested, there is little room for any kind of expansive understanding because they are ‘only given two lines to give it’.

2:1 stated that he did not personally use word banks or word based activities: ‘I don’t … but I wouldn’t stop any of my department using them’. However, following further discussion he acknowledged that he did concentrate on the key words for the exam from the text book. He went on to say that, particularly with the lower ability: ‘We get them to learn the definition pretty parrot-fashion because at least that’s some marks in the bag’. This teacher was, however, well aware of the potential problems of a word bank approach. Not only is it difficult to see how one can move students from a passive dictionary understanding of a word to an expansive and active understanding of a word,
but also: ‘Sometimes the definition isn’t very good anyway’. The overriding factor was the examination: ‘I keep coming back to exam technique’.

Similarly 2:4 felt that he was compelled to use a word bank approach for the Edexcel exam because the exam itself was ‘keyword driven’. He saw this as problematic. The system was ‘exam and results driven’ and so one felt compelled to ‘get them to understand the words … that is your prime objective to enable them to get the marks in the exam’.

At School 3 teacher 3:1, was not really in favour of the use of word banks or glossary of terms and rarely used these approaches: ‘I am very conscious that words mean different things to different people’, she suggested. She also felt that an over emphasis on simple standard definitions discourages the students from thinking for themselves:

We are panicking students because when somebody says, “I don’t understand what that word means”, and you say, “What do you think it means?” – they think there is a definition they need rather than thinking for themselves.

Both teachers 3:2 and 3:3, however, did use word banks: ‘I think more with Year 7 and 8 … not really with GCSE’. Interestingly a reversal of the position at schools 1 and 2 where great emphasis was placed on ‘key words’ and where word banks were rarely used at Key Stage 3. At school 3 a number of non-specialist teachers were responsible for delivering Religious Education and teacher 3:2 acknowledged a potential problem with non-specialist teachers using word banks with simple definitions of words because these teachers might be unaware of the complexity of religious words and varieties of meaning.

Interestingly, at school 4, the head of department, 4:1; felt that the use of word banks or glossaries of terms might be helpful for teachers with very little subject knowledge. From his own perspective, he stated that, ‘I tend not to use it at all’. However, he acknowledged that he would put key words on the board during lessons. This teacher did not use other word based activities like crosswords in his teaching, at least ‘not so much anymore’, as he did not see the purpose of these as a learning experience.

Teacher 4:2 was positive about the use of word banks or glossaries of terms: ‘I think it’s good to have a glossary … so they can look back’. The strength of this approach, she
argued, was that it was useful for the purpose of revision, and so, ‘I would only use glossaries as a revision tool’. 4:2 felt that it was only appropriate to include a word in a glossary that has been discussed at some length in class first. In this way, she argued, pupils had an expansive understanding of a word before a shorter definition is included in the glossary. The glossary then becomes a tool to jog the memory.

The teachers at school 5 were far more enthusiastic about the use of word banks and glossaries of terms. Teacher 5:1 stated that, ‘…we’ve usually got key words up on the wall [and] on the board in the lesson words will appear’. She argued that: ‘Having the key words up and around you can refer to them; they can point them out … [and] remind themselves what they are’. These words would then remain on the board throughout the topic during which time they would be added to. Whilst this teacher did not perceive any weaknesses with this approach, when pushed she did acknowledge that simple one word definitions could be problematic. This approach might be used with the lowest ability students, ‘but with the higher ability it’s much more of a discussion of a key word and applying it’.

Similarly teacher 5:2 was enthusiastic about the use of word banks or glossaries of terms. The students ‘keep a glossary at the back of their books’. But she stated that: ‘We only do it on a basic level … basic key words’. The purpose of this approach, she argued, was partly, ‘… to try to understand religious terminology, to be able to understand and explain it [things that they] need to understand’. She also believed that as an approach it worked: ‘I do think it works … if you don’t understand a key word you won’t understand a key belief’.

Teachers 5:1 and 5:2 did not use word searches, crosswords, or other word based activities. Teacher 5:1, felt that ‘it’s too basic’ and was clear that, ‘[I] don’t like those’. Teacher 5:3, on the other hand, felt that crosswords and word searches, ‘are good revision tools, or a starter’. This teacher also concentrated on key words because one criteria for assessment was how well they had understood key words, but she was at pains to explain that this would not be a simple one word definition of key words, but more of an expansive explanation.
At school 6 teacher 6:1 only used word banks for less able students, generally in conjunction with the special educational needs department. This would involve a few key words for SEN students, but would be focussed more upon spelling than definition. This approach would also be applied by other departments at the school and was more concerned with the way in which words were commonly spelt in English rather than something which was subject specific.

6:3 used a word bank approach extensively. Students, ‘... make glossaries as we go through’, and there will be ‘key words’ on the PowerPoint presentations for students to learn. This teacher felt that this approach was, ‘hugely beneficial’ and it was an approach which ‘helps understanding’. Initially this teacher could not see ‘any negatives’ with this approach but after further discussion in the interview reflected that the approach could be problematic, teaching students deficient or misleading definitions of words and concepts:

I hadn’t thought about that ... we might be getting it wrong, we might be teaching them our understanding or our cultures understanding.

Teacher 6:3 did, however, wonder whether it was possible to fully understand many Islamic words and concepts unless one happened to be a Muslim.

As we have previously noted, the observations revealed that word based activities dominated many of the lessons. This was particularly the case at schools 1 and 2, where the lessons observed concentrated largely on definitions of key words which would be needed for the GCSE examination paper. The interviews with teachers confirmed that word activities played a key role at all of the schools. A policy document from School 2, detailing the aims and objectives of Religious Education stressed that:

Staff should provide a glossary of words with each module in order to aid correct spelling, understanding of the meanings and use of words.

The word bank approach is further emphasised by its dominance in text books. A content analysis revealed that key words, glossaries of terms and word based activities feature in all of the text books in the sample.

Sue Penney has a dictionary list on each page. This consists of some of the words in the text on that particular page, along with a very simple definition. There is also a short
glossary at the end of the book, which also gives very simple, one might say superficial definitions to words. The words that are defined are never potentially contentious words or phenomena. With Penney there is an issue in respect of spelling. At the beginning of her book Penney tells us that all Arabic words have been changed into the English alphabet. This means that they are sometimes spelled differently: ‘For example, Muhammad can be spelled Mahomet, and Makkah can be spelled Mecca’ (7). She goes on to claim that: ‘The spellings used in this book are those which give the closest sound to the word’ (7). And so we have Makkah and Qur’an rather than Mecca and Koran. However, Penney is not always consistent in applying her own rule, and so, for example, the angel Jibril is given his traditional Western spelling of Gabriel, which most certainly does not sound like his Arabic equivalent. Her definitions are not only superficial but are, on occasion, misleading. And so ‘Jihad’ is defined simply as the ‘Muslim name for fighting against evil’. ‘Hadith’ as ‘important books for Muslims’. We have ‘meditate’ as ‘to think deeply – usually about religion.’ ‘Fasting’ is ‘doing without food and drink for religious reasons.’ Finally, the word ‘Islam’ is not defined as submission or surrender to God, or even as peace, rather Islam is simply the, ‘Religion of Muslims, following the teachings of Muhammad’. Along with this superficial and sometimes misleading definition of words, Penney includes a number of word based activities throughout the book. We have word searches, anagrams, passages of text with words missing which have to be filled in with words from a list that is provided. One must question the educational value of this type of task. Even the ‘quick quiz’ on each page requires only a cursory understanding of Islam.

Aylett and O’Donnell provide a glossary of words at the back of their text book. Again this tends to give rather superficial definitions of words. What is perhaps most significant, however, are the words that are missing from the glossary. These tend to be words which might be more contentious, or difficult to define without a more expansive explanation. And so, for example, words like ‘Jihad’ are missing from the glossary. The spelling of words tends not to be systematic in that we have some words spelt phonetically and with traditional Western spelling in brackets, like Makkah (Mecca) and Madinah (Medina), but other words not treated in this way, and so Abraham and
Gabriel. As with Penney we have word searches, find the missing words, and other word based tasks of dubious educational value.

Wood encourages students to compile a Hajj word list, and even details which words students should write down: Burka, Hajj, Ihram, Makkah. They are then required to find the definitions from the text on the page. Later they are required to produce a Mosque word list. The glossary of terms provided at the back of the book is very short, and gives very terse definitions. Once again potentially contentious words are not included. Similarly, Dilwyn Hunt includes a number of activities based upon words including crosswords and word searches.

Kendrick, though including some simplistic tasks such as word searches and quick quizzes, nonetheless provides a more detailed glossary. In general words are given a more expansive understanding than many text books in the sample, but there is still a danger that relatively short dictionary definitions do not adequately convey meaning. And so ‘Jihad’, is defined as ‘striving’ and as a ‘Holy War, in defence of God’s will’, but this does not adequately convey the depth of meaning that the word conveys.

Keene does not include a glossary. However, he does provide ‘for your dictionary’ text boxes on most pages of the book. Like Kendrick he attempts to provide the reader with more expansive definitions to words. Similarly Hussein and Jordan provide lists of words on each page of the book. But in this case definitions are not provided, just spelling. The reader has to find the definition to the word in the main text of the page. This allows for more in depth definitions of words.

We have previously seen how ‘Key Words’ feature greatly in the Edexcel Religion and Life and Religion in Society syllabus. Not surprisingly this finds its expression in the text books by Victor Watton. However, many of the key words in the text book are not specifically religious, rather they are often technical and scientific definitions of issues. Indeed, in the glossary of terms at the back of Religion and Society, only eight words are specifically connected to Islam, and none of them are potentially contentious.
4.28 Primary Sources

Hayward (2006) argues that students are rarely encouraged to engage with primary texts, a point further emphasised with Kay and Linnet Smith (2002) in their work on the teaching of Christianity in schools. Their research had concluded that 28.1% of pupils had never used a bible in class when studying Christianity. Tames (1986) contends that teachers should become familiar with the primary texts of Islam. Homan (2004) and Kay and Linnet Smith go further. Homan argues that learning is often at second or third hand, using text books or works sheets rather than primary texts. It is, therefore, removed from practical experience. Kay and Linnet Smith (2002) had found that in their research sample primary texts were rarely, if ever, used.

Within the context of the sample it was evident that primary texts were rarely used. In some schools students reflected upon short passages from the Qur’an and Hadith reproduced in text books, often for the purpose of examinations. In other schools primary texts were never used. In only one of the schools were students introduced to the Qur’an as a text, other than when it was used as an artefact.

At school 1 the head of department, teacher 1:1 stated that she never used the Qur’an or Hadith other than the passages in text books because ‘I haven’t got time’. Both teachers 1:2 and 1:3 also stated that students were only introduced to primary texts through the short passages in the Victor Watton text books.

The same picture emerged in school 2 where all of the teachers acknowledged that students’ only experience of the primary texts of Islam came through the passages of the Victor Watton text books which, to use a phrase of teacher 2:1, was ‘sprinkled with quotations’. This teacher was, however, critical of the English translation of the Qur’an used by Victor Watton, which he believed to be very old fashioned: ‘I refuse to believe that there aren’t more modern translations’. Teacher 2:4 did get students to write a passage from the Qur’an in their exercise books and decorate it, but acknowledged that students were not introduced to the Qur’an and Hadith as sacred texts. This teacher would have liked to have seen more use of primary texts along with textual analysis.
School 3 was the only school where pupils were expected to have some knowledge of the primary texts of Islam. 3:1 stated that when looking at particular topics students, ‘are required to read and pick out the meaning from the Qur’an or the bible’. She argued that this was important: ‘Students need to go to the first authority’, she said. This teacher did, however, acknowledge that there were occasionally problems with students refusing to read from religious texts, either as a matter of principle or to deliberately cause difficulty. She currently had a group of Year 9 students who were refusing to read, or even touch, copies of the bible; although she did not think that there were any particular religious reasons for this.

At school 4 teacher 4:1 did not use primary texts because he felt that they would be too difficult for pupils to understand. Teacher 4:2, on the other hand, had introduced pupils to portions of the Qur’an when dealing with specific topics: ‘Yes, I have used quotes from the Qur’an to do with hijab and ... gender, but I can’t think of anything else’. She acknowledged that use of primary texts had been very limited.

At school 5 teacher 5:1, believed that introducing the pupils to primary texts was ‘actually quite important’. Students would use ‘bits’ of primary text, looking at what the Qur’an and Hadith say when dealing with specific topics, generally taken from the portions of the primary text found in the text book. In this Church school this teacher felt that this approach was particularly helpful with the higher ability children as a focus for discussion: ‘They will compare naturally with Christianity and a lot of them will say how similar it is to the sort of things they find in the Bible’.

Teacher 5:2 had ‘used’ the Qur’an as an artefact, but only in order to show the pupils what it looked like and how it would be treated by a practicing Muslim. Students had not actually studied the Qur’an as a religious text, although they had looked at quotations in text books, on worksheets, and on displays in the classroom.

Teacher 5:3 had not used primary texts in the teaching of Islam, suggesting that it would be too complicated for pupils.

There is limited use of primary texts at school 6. Teacher 6:1 would use them with students in the 6th form, but not lower down the school. Teacher 6:2 did select passages
from the Qur’an and the Hadith when students were researching particular topics, and the Qur’an was also used as an artefact, but to give students an understanding of what it looked like rather than for any experiential purpose. Teacher 6:3 had not used primary texts.

Conclusion

Teachers argued that the Religious Education was important for a number of reasons: First, it encouraged tolerance by enabling students to understand differing view-points from their own. This was felt to be particularly important in a multi-cultural and multi faith society. Second, Religious Education encouraged students to empathize with other religious points of view, and also to explore life’s ‘big questions’ for themselves, along with their own search for meaning. In both of the faith schools in the sample teachers suggested that Religious Education was important to enable students to reflect upon their own faith. Religious Education was also important, many teachers suggested, because it taught cross curricular skills and covered topic which could be taught across the curriculum. The view was also expressed that many of the topics that are covered will be important to students in later life. This was a particularly strong feeling in this schools which taught the Edexcel GCSE syllabus. What was significant is that none of the teachers mentioned ‘community cohesion’ as a raison d’être for teaching Religious Education.

Teachers acknowledged that pupils often became confused and mixed up the beliefs and practices of different religions. This appeared to be a particular problem in those schools where all six world religions were studied, and was compounded when a thematic study of religions is undertaken. This would support the research of Kay and Linnet Smith (2002). In spite of this there appeared to be no indication from the heads of departments that the number of world religions might be reduced in order to prevent confusion. There was a suggestion at school 4 that there was a racial element to confusion with pupils regarding all people of Asian descent as Muslim. It might be significant that this school is located in an area which has little racial diversity. At schools where Islam and Christianity are studied for the Edexcel GCSE there was a suggestion that the similarity between the two religions might lead to confusion. The head of department at school 2
had decided to drop Islam in the next academic year (2010-2011) in favour of Hinduism, but this was *not* because of the concern that pupils become confused. Rather he argued that he was reacting against what he believed was a political expectation that Islam be studied precisely because of the community cohesion agenda. He also contended that pupils enjoyed Hinduism more than Islam. There was no intention to replace Islam at school 1.

Across the sample a phenomenological approach was dominant, often alongside a thematic approach to the study of religions. Teachers spoke of the aspiration toward more innovative teaching methods, but suggested that constraints of time-table space led to this being unfulfilled. A variety of teaching methods was more common at Key Stage 3, but at Key Stage 4 the GCSE tended to determine the method. In schools 1 and 2 the thematic nature of the Edexcel syllabus led to a thematic style of teaching. Many teachers expressed concern relating to the two attainment targets, AT1 and AT2, and many found it difficult to achieve AT2 (learning from).

Responses to Barnes’ hypothesis concerning competing issues of truth were fascinating. With the exception of 2:1, all teachers acknowledged the importance of understanding divergent truth claims but many acknowledged that this was not something that was undertaken in Religious Education. This was partly due to the construction of syllabuses which did not allow for this, but there were specific issues in relation to Islam. Two teachers claimed that a deficiency in subject knowledge made them uneasy to tackle complex and controversial issues. Teachers acknowledged that they often shied away from discussing issues of truth and the controversial in Islam because they felt compelled to present a positive image of Islam, and for fear of upsetting parents if controversial issues were discussed. In this respect they were more likely to be critical of Christianity than Islam.

Text books were used extensively in the schools within the sample, excepting school 6 (but here the PowerPoint slides took the place of text books). The Edexcel GCSE syllabus led to a style of teaching which often consisted of learning the content of the text books by Victor Watton, written specifically for the examination. The observations
indicated that where text books dominated lessons pupils became disengaged and bored. Conversely, where lessons were more varied, pupils appeared to enjoy the lesson.

Word banks, glossaries, key words, and word games played a prominent role in the schools in the sample. They also featured in text books. In general the definitions of words given in text books were simple dictionary explanations and were not expansive. On occasion they were misleading. Significantly, potentially contentious or controversial concepts are generally absent from glossaries, or given dubious interpretations, presumably so as not to cause offence, or in a bid to avoid the controversial and present an ‘acceptable’ vision of Islam. The dominance of ‘key words’ in the Edexcel syllabus led to teaching that was key word driven. Pupils found this tedious and boring.

Primary texts are rarely used in the teaching of Islam. Teachers argued that they would be too complex for pupils to understand, or that they do not have time. On occasion pupils are shown brief passages on the Qur’an or the Hadith, often from text books, but little more. Given the centrality of the Qur’an (as the actual word of God and his final revelation to mankind) and of the Sunnah of the prophet (as the exemplar of God’s will) this is surely a glaring omission in the construction of Islam.

4.3 Text books and Resources

Introduction

The literature raised a number of issues in respect of the construction of Islam and resources, in particular text books. First, a degree of apprehension that text books on Islam are generally written by non-Muslims, leading to a fear that what is constructed is a westernised version of Islam from the perspective of an outsider looking in. At worst this could lead to a construction which would confirm negative stereotypes and which would construct Islam in such a way as to make it unrecognizable to Muslims. Second, alongside this was an anxiety that what is constructed is a homogenous vision of Islam with little room for diversity. Third, a concern that the text books themselves attempt to include too much material, leading to a superficial construction, and that volume of content left little room for depth or diversity.
Taken together the major concern revolves around the question: Whose construction of Islam is being taught? Is it a westernised-Christian construction and one which presents a superficial vision of Islam, or are there attempts to understand Islam as a Muslim might understand it?

4.3.1 Text books and resources utilized in the sample schools

In the review of the literature it became evident that many writers expressed some unease with regard to the text books used for the purpose of teaching Islam. Zaki (1982) was critical of text books used in schools on the grounds that they were generally written by non-Muslims, and contained many inaccuracies; Ahsan (1988) was equally critical of the resources engaged in the teaching of Islam. Generally, he suggested, they were written by non-Muslims and sometimes served to reinforce negative stereotypes. Tames (1986) had argued that teachers need to familiarise themselves with works by Muslims, along with first-hand accounts of the Muslim world from non-Muslim writers, in order to give a fair and balanced account of the Islamic faith and culture. From the perspective of Zaki, Ahsan and Tames text books tend to construct a view of Islam from the outside in, a western non-Muslim construction of Islam, sometimes inaccurate, and sometimes reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes.

Of the six schools in the sample only one, school 5, used a text book that was written by a Muslim. At school 6 text books were not employed at all. Text books were used more frequently at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3, generally for the purpose of public examinations. The two schools which taught Islam at Key Stage 4 made extensive use of Victor Watton’s *Religion and Life*, endorsed for use with the Edexcel syllabus.

At school 1 text books tend only to be used at Key Stage 4 and for the purpose of public examinations. 1:1 was clear that: ‘I don’t use text books at all’ at Key Stage 3 where a more experiential and ‘creative’ approach to Religious Education is adopted. But it is at Key Stage 4 that Islam is taught and here the text book that is used is Victor Watton’s *Religion and Life* and *Religion and Society*, both of which were written with the Edexcel syllabus in mind, and were endorsed by that examination board. Like the syllabus the books look at a variety of themes and reflect upon the attitude of religions to each particular theme. In spite of the fact that it is used extensively, Teacher 1:1 was
critical of this book on the grounds that it is just, ‘a text book full of bullet points for the exam’. She also acknowledged that it presented a consensual view of Islam. Nonetheless, because of its close association with the examination syllabus, it was used comprehensively. In addition to these two core text books the school had also produced an in-house revision booklet which was intended to give students all of the information needed to pass the exam.

Teacher 1:2 commented upon what he perceived to be a weakness with the text books by Watton. He argued that they were written very much from a western viewpoint with Christianity as the dominant religion. For this reason, ‘the Christianity pages tend to be two or three on a subject and the Islam a paragraph’. This, he argued, was problematic because, ‘In the exam, it seems as if the questions are of equal weight expecting an equal response and sometimes the information isn’t given out equally’.

At school two Sue Penney’s Discovering Religions: Islam, was the primary text book at Key Stage 3. Dilwyn Hunt’s book, Muhammad was also used. Teacher 2:3 used the Penney text extensively on the grounds that it was ‘simple’. She did, however, acknowledge that it was ‘quite general’ and that it was sometimes challenged by Muslim pupils: ‘Because Islam is so diverse quite a lot of them will say, “Well I don’t do that”’. She suggested that the Penny book offered a ‘generic’ view of Islam. In acknowledging the diversity of Islam this teacher also agreed that the text books tended to present a homogenous portrait of the religion: ‘Yes, particularly looking at the text books it’s put very much in that way’. She also suggested that text books tended to present a western construction of Islam. Along with text books occasional DVD material is used, among this the Life of Muhammad film from the Quest series of animations.

At Key Stage 4, and for the purpose of the Edexcel GCSE course, the primary text books that are utilized are Victor Watton’s Religion and Life, and Religion and Society. Supplementary text books include Religion in Life and Society by Michael Keene (also endorsed by Edexcel), Contemporary Moral Issues by Joe Jenkins and Religion in Focus: Islam by Geoff Teece. The more gifted pupils might be asked to look at Keene and compare it with Watton. None of these books are written by Muslim authors. Teacher 2:1, whilst acknowledging that text books were used extensively, particularly at
Key Stage 4, expressed a concern that: ‘The text books are very concerned that all religions, and Islam in particular in the current climate, are seen in a positive light’. This appears to reflect the perception by this teacher that Religious Education is being politicised in order to promote ‘community cohesion’ and to ‘educate for diversity.’

Teacher 2:2 felt that the text books were ‘tedious, to some extent ... and they are so concise’. Although she used the text books to give the students a basic understanding she felt that it was, ‘difficult to do something innovative with the text books’ and so she tended to use them as a starting point and would then ‘veer away’ from them. This teacher also argued that care needed to be taken with some of the text books which she felt went too far and constructed a version of Islam which was ‘whiter than white’ and which, ‘denigrates other peoples beliefs about Islam too far.’

2:4 reflected that the Watton text book, along with the exam syllabus, was responsible for the construction of Islam that is presented in schools. Because teachers feel obliged to follow the text book in order to get a good grade in the exam it therefore ‘constructs itself’.

3:1 accepted the criticisms made by Zaki et al: ‘I don’t think the text books we have are … written by Muslims’. Indeed, as head of department she has taken the decision not to use text books for this very reason:

We have made a deliberate choice on that because if we are not careful you get the most offensive things written in text books by students, or drawings. Everybody who looks like a Muslim is Osama bin Laden or Saddam Husain.

Alongside fears of graffiti by students this teacher argued that: ‘I don’t think text books are good learning’. However, in the observation with teacher 3:2 at this school two text books were used, *The Muslim Experience* by J.F. Aylett and Kevin O’Donnell and *This is Islam* by Michael Keene. During the lesson the pupils were engaged in a task which involved ‘transforming’ a picture of the inside of a church into a mosque. The books were given to the pupils as a resource to jog their memories. Text books also featured extensively in schemes of work.

At School 4 the text book which was used in the teaching of Islam is *Islam for Today* by Angela Wood. Again, this is a text book written by a non-Muslim. Teacher 4:1 agreed
that it presented a consensual view of Islam and that it was ‘very outdated’. He also argued that:

It needs a British Muslims perspective in there, I think it is stuff I was learning when I did GCSE, and it’s all very basic bog standard … I don’t think it is representative of how Islam is in this country today.

At this school Dilwyn Hunt’s *Muhammad* is also utilized, as well as *Examining Religions: Islam* by Rosalyn Kendrick. The DVD, *Muhammad* from the *Quest* series of animations is also used, as is the BBC series, *Belief File: Islam*, particularly the section on the Hajj.

School 5 is the only school in the sample which adopts a text book that has been written, at least in part, by a Muslim. They also used film, in particular *Belief File: Islam* in relation to Hajj and Prayer and the DVD *Muhammad* from the *Quest* series of animations. Both of these present a Muslim perspective.

At School 6 text books were not used at all in the teaching of RE. The head of department had produced her own resources which were also used by other members of the department. These consist largely of PowerPoint presentations written by the head of department. She argued that: ‘We haven’t come across a good text book’ and suggested that text books at GCSE level were, ‘either really patronising ... or not theologically accurate’. Alongside the ‘in house’ resources some audio visual material was used in this school and which looked at Islam from the point of view of the practicing Muslim. In this way the school attempted to present a ‘balanced’ construction of Islam, regarding it both from the point of view of the outsider and the insider. An analysis of the PowerPoint presentations reveal that the construction of Islam appears to be consensual. There is mention of Sunni, Shia and Sufi, but this is fairly superficial and the overall construction views Islam very much from the dominant Sunni perspective. Difficult or contentious issues are generally ignored.

For the purpose of the research the main text books utilized at the schools were subjected to a detailed content analysis. This consisted of ten text books, including one ‘in-house’ revision booklet used at school 1. Some of these text books were used at only one school, others in more than one school. A sample of audio visual material was also
subjected to content analysis. In the case of text books the sample would suggest that the criticisms raised by Zaki (1982) and a number of the teachers in the schools had a basis in truth. All but one of the text books were written by non-Muslims. The one exception to this was the text book *Religions and Beliefs* co-written by a Muslim, Musharraf Hussain, and a non-Muslim, Anne Jordan. The audio visual material, on the other hand, (which consisted of the *Belief File* series and the *Life of Muhammad* from the *Quest* series, chosen because they were widely used across the schools) were produced by Muslims.

Zaki *et al had* argued that text books which are written by non-Muslims are likely to give an inaccurate construction of Islam, and would contain inaccuracies along with negative stereotypes. Whilst a close analysis of the sample text books written by non-Muslims certainly raises some issues with regard to construction, analysis would also suggest that the text book co-authored by a Muslim also raises similar issues and begs the question whether it merely substitutes one construction with another. Furthermore, the suggestion that text books written by non-Muslims are likely to reinforce negative stereotypes is not supported by an analysis of the texts. Rather, what we tend to find is a construction of Islam which is distorted by writers overcompensating. In order *not* to reinforce negative stereotypes writers appear to construct a version of Islam in which difficult issues are ignored or glossed over, and where diversity and conflict is disregarded. This appears to reinforce what teachers claimed they were already doing, presenting a positive view of Islam in order to counteract negative stereotyping. This occurs in a number of ways.

**4.32 A positive history of Islam**

In general the texts books portray the life of Muhammad, the rise of Islam and the history of Islam in an extremely positive way. Tradition is treated as though it were historical fact. We are rarely told, ‘Muslims believe that ...’. Instead we are told that Muhammad *received* visions from Jibril, the Night Journey *did* occur, Muhammad *was* God’s messenger who had come to bring the final revelation to humankind, and so forth. When retelling the life of Muhammad the books by Penney, Wood, Hunt, Aylett and O’Donnell, and Keene, all present us with a man well known for his honesty, and for
being a good man. He is always contrasted with the evil inhabitants of Makkah, who are idol worshippers and who exploit the poor and weak. Anything that might challenge this view is either ignored or given a positive spin. And so the military action against the inhabitants of Makkah occurs because they were evil, or had broken a treaty, or were greedy. Similarly the DVD *The Life of Muhammad*, which, as we have seen, is widely used in the schools in our sample, provides us with this same portrayal of the prophet and the rise of Islam. The film is an animated account of Muhammad’s life, produced for Channel 4. The advisor to the film was a Muslim, Dr. Masuq Ally, and is clearly produced by Muslims. In essence its portrayal of the life of Muhammad is no different to that given in the text books by non-Muslims. Muhammad is described as ‘the greatest man in the world’. Out of respect he is never actually ‘seen’. Tradition is treated as fact (our narrator tells us that he is going to relay ‘exactly what happened’). And so the revelations to Muhammad are treated as historical events, rather than articles of belief. The words of the Angel were ‘truly the word of God’. The life of Muhammad, and the rise of Islam, is portrayed as a battle between good and evil. Makkah was ‘not safe for man or woman or child’, but with the success of Muhammad’s mission, ‘it all changed’. This is a battle between the forces of good and evil. In the text books and in this film the military conflict itself is largely ignored, as is the expulsion and slaughter of Jewish tribes in Madinah. Aylett and O’Donnell go so far as to mention the Jewish tribes in Madinah, and that Muhammad: ‘hoped that the local Jews would become Muslims’ (15), but we are told nothing of their fate.

The military expansion of Islam in the early centuries is also seen in a positive light. For example, according to Penney: ‘Muhammad had taught that fighting was not wrong if it was to defend yourself, and if it meant that Islam could spread’ (28). And the spread of Islam was to stop people doing things that are wrong. Jihad is described merely as the, ‘Muslim name for fighting against evil’ (29). For Aylett and O’Donnell this is seen in the light of the early Muslim armies fighting back, ‘when neighbouring rulers tried to stop people worshipping as Muslims’ (16).

The Crusades are also seen from the perspective of Islamic tradition, with the Crusaders generally regarded as barbaric and brutal, and the forces of Islam sophisticated, peace-loving, and merciful. Aylett and O’Donnell even suggest that Richard the Lion heart was
Satanic, when compared with Saladin. Penney affords the Muslim victors the moral high-ground because they allowed Christians and Jews to retain their own faith, albeit provided they paid extra taxes. Whilst this history doubtless contains much that is true, it is clearly a distortion, and one which is clearly sympathetic to Islam.

Perhaps a significant difference between the text books written by non-Muslims and the book in our sample co-written by a Muslim is that the latter does not include a potted history of the life of Muhammad, in fact there is very little biographical information at all. It is also interesting that this book alone generally prefixes sentences with the phrase: ‘Muslims believe …’ unlike those written by non-Muslims which often appear to accept tradition and belief as fact. However, the concerns of Zaki et al regarding negative stereotyping would appear to be unfounded. The distortion that does occur seeks to present Islam in a positive light, even to the extent of overcompensating.

4.33 Diversity or Unity? Consensus or Discord?

In presenting their ‘potted’ history of Islam none of the text books reflect upon the conflict in the early Muslim community which led to the assassination of Uthman and, later, of Ali. The history of Islam is portrayed as being consensual and devoid of conflict.

In respect of contemporary Islam little mention is made of diversity within Islam, and the two main sects of Sunni and Shia are generally given superficial treatment. Kendrick does not mention them at all. Wood alerts us to the fact that the majority of Muslims in the world are Sunni, but never mentions the Shia at all. Furthermore, her definition of the Sunni as ‘those who accept the Sunnah as the basis of their faith and life’, (42) is a little superficial. Wood presents a consensual Islam where: ‘The essentials are found everywhere. They have not changed and will never change’ (2). Penney includes a brief section entitled ‘Modern Islam’ where there is a description of Sunni and Shia. However, this is regarded very much from a Sunni perspective. And so the Shia are perceived as expressing a ‘later’ understanding of the Caliphate, which is surely not how they would understand their tradition. She is very keen to express the view that both Sunni’s and Shia accept the main beliefs and way of worship of Islam. Other books, too, briefly mention the Sunni and Shia, although they say nothing of their origin.
Aylett and O’Donnell speak of Sunni and Shia Muslims and detail some of the main differences between them. However, it could be argued that their understanding comes very much from a Sunni perspective. The origins of the Shi’a is distorted in favour of the Sunni point of view, with the word Sunni defined as meaning ‘orthodox’. The section on Muslim beliefs is seen from a Sunni perspective, the word Imam is only defined as ‘prayer leader’; festivals and worship are from a Sunni point of view. The festival of Ashura is given its Sunni understanding and yet, rather confusingly, we later see a picture of Shi’a pilgrims beating themselves at Ashura to remember the martyrdom of Hussein. One could argue, therefore, that although diversity is expressed, the construction of Islam in this book is from a Sunni perspective.

Watton, in his books written for the Edexcel syllabus, generally presents a consensual, broadly Sunni understanding of Islam. Occasionally reference is made to ‘Most Muslims’ or ‘Some Muslims’, but by this he is generally making a distinction between traditional and liberal Muslims.

Keene, on the other hand is keen to express the diversity of Islam. At the beginning of his book he mentions ‘cultural’ diversity, and has a brief section on Sunni and Shi’a, as well as a brief mention of Sufism. In this respect his view that ‘many’ Sunni and Shi’a are Sufis is, of course, a distortion. In reality ‘few’ would be more correct. His distinction between Sunni and Shi’a and the differences between them, particularly over the issue of leadership, is very balanced to both sides. At the same time he is keen to express the unity of all Muslims, stressing that both sects:

Belong to the one religion of Islam. They all agree on the Shahadah, they follow the Sunnah of the Prophet ... they share the same principles of belief and behaviour. (6)

One could argue that this is somewhat overstated, after all they do not share the same Hadith, and they do not follow their faith in the same way. Whilst acknowledging the differences Keene does go some way toward expressing the diversity of Islam. However, he too presents us with a generally Sunni construction of Islam. All of the major topics, for example the Five Pillars of Islam and Islamic festivals, are viewed from the Sunni perspective.
In respect of diversity we find that once again our text books written by non-Muslims do not substantially differ from the one text book in our sample co-written by a Muslim. Hussain and Jordan mention Sunni and Shi’a at the very beginning of their book, but in very little detail. We are told that the division occurred in the early years following the death of Muhammad over the issue of leadership. The two groups are never mentioned again. Indeed, what is presented is a consensual Islam based upon the Sunni tradition (from which the author comes). One is given the impression that all Muslims believe the same thing and practice their faith in the same way.

Few of the text books appear to be willing to discuss the issue of conflict within Islam itself. Aylett and O’Donnell acknowledge conflicting views with regard to the way states should be organised, using Iran as an example, and mention the Iran/Iraq war, but this only constitutes one sentence and there is no discussion or analysis.

4.34 Islamic Values and Western Values

Rosalyn Kendrick, in her book, *Examining Religions: Islam*, compares Islam with contemporary western culture. Here Islam is regarded favourably against what she perceives to be a corrupt and immoral Western Society. This clearly affects her construction of Islam. In the context of human relationships, we are told, for example, that Muslims:

> Have observed how the West has tried to do away with traditional roles, with catastrophic consequences for sexual morality and child rearing and breakdown of families leading to stress, depression and suicide ... Muslims are appalled by the influence of Western television – the blatant advertising of alcohol, the portrayal of sex (normal and perverted).

One is left wondering if the author’s construction is, at least in part, dependent upon her own moral standpoint. This appears to be clear from the leading questions that pupils are asked to consider. For example: ‘Is the permissive society more cruel than the harsh extremes of Islamic Law?; ‘See if you can find out the figures of the number of abortions carried out on babies in Britain over the last few years’.
Aylett and O’Donnell also have a tendency to compare the morality of Islam with the depravity of Western culture.

Whilst perhaps less extreme in their views, other writers are keen to highlight Islamic ethical teaching and practice in a positive way. All of the text books focus on the importance of marriage and the family, often including the extended family. Respect for parents and the positive treatment of children are highlighted. Potentially difficult issues surrounding marriage are never mentioned, even by way of dismissal. And so we are told constantly that there is arranged marriage in Islam, the benefits of which are espoused, but never the possible disadvantages. Students will doubtless be aware of the reality of forced marriage from the media, but this is never discussed, not even in an attempt to dismiss the practice as un-Islamic. Similarly genital mutilation is ignored.

Keene is eager to stress the positive qualities of Islamic life:

They should avoid extremes and encourage each other to do good ... they should work together for the good of all people ... [they] must also try to do their best for their family, for orphans, for the needy and the sick. They must try to be tolerant and forgiving. (5)

‘They must do good and avoid evil, be kind and generous to everyone, particularly the poor weak and old and lonely ... [they must] fight injustice and oppression.’ (11).

The concept of charity is frequently emphasised in the text books, in particular ‘zakat’. In general, however, the books only present a limited understanding of what zakat is for. Aylett and O’Donnell, for example, stress that, ‘Zakah helps to make a fairer society’ (37), and give the example of the help the Muslim community might give to a widowed mother. Penney, that it is given to ‘charity’ and ‘is used for things like helping poorer Muslims, building hospitals etc’. One is left with the impression that zakah is no more than charitable giving, not that it is solely for the benefit of the Islamic community, nor that its uses can include such things as conversion (although Wood does mention ‘winning over hearts’ to Islam) or even Jihad (although Wood mentions ‘any action in the cause of Allah’ and Hussein and Jordan, ‘for the cause of God’).
The ethical treatment of animals is raised by some of the text books. Aylett and O’Donnell contrast what they regard as the humane method of halal butchering with: ‘Western abattoirs, where animals are herded in together and are pushed and shoved like feelingless objects’. (55). Kendrick likewise compares the ‘humane’ halal method of killing animals with that employed in ‘Western’ abattoirs.

4.35 The Gift of Islam to the world

Many of the text books are keen to stress the positive contribution that the Islamic world has made in the fields of science, medicine, and mathematics. This is true of books in our sample by non-Muslims and in our text book by Hussein and Jordan. Aylett and O’Donnell, in a section entitled ‘Islam’s Gifts to the World’, compare medieval Christianity, which, they claim discouraged scientific discovery, with Islam which always encouraged the expansion of knowledge. Whilst there is some truth in this, and one cannot deny the advances in knowledge that have been the legacy of medieval Islam, this is something of a simplification. Penney goes even more overboard in her chapter ‘Islam’s effect on the world’. One is left with the impression that Islam, and Islam alone, is responsible for civilisation as we know it.

It is interesting to note that when presenting a history of Islam the text books have a tendency to go no further forward than the Middle Ages, which one could argue was a golden period of Islamic culture. Hussein and Jordan, in a chapter entitled ‘Islam and Science’, refer to Islamic discoveries in maths, physics, medicine, astronomy and chemistry ‘long before the medieval Christians’ and how Islam ‘laid the foundation of modern science.’ (22). They argue that Muslims accept the theory of the Big Bang, but gloss over the attitude of Islam to evolution, merely stating that ‘Muslims would not entirely agree with this theory’ (23).

Whilst applauding the contribution of Islam to scientific, medical and mathematical knowledge is not itself a distortion, perhaps its overemphasis is, and serves the purpose of portraying Islam in a positive light, dispelling negative stereotypes of Islam as ‘backward’ or somehow ‘uncivilized’.
4.36 The World, the Community and Social Cohesion

Hussein and Jordan have a section entitled ‘Social Responsibilities’ which portrays a positive image of Islam in society. We are told that: ‘Islam teaches that human beings are all Allah’s family,’ (38). They go on to state that:

We are all brothers and sisters to one another and we are all equal. Muslims believe God wishes people to be good to each other, to respect one another and to look after each other. (38).

We are given examples of Muslims who are good citizens of the United Kingdom, for example a Muslim police officer. This is, of course, admirable, and one is in no doubt that the vast majority of Muslims would see themselves as good citizens of their nation. Alongside this, however, is the ambiguity, which is not mentioned by Hussein and Jordan, of Muslims often claiming their first allegiance to the Ummah, with national allegiance to nationality as secondary, and whether this has the capacity to create conflict. Ultimately one is left questioning whether this is not an idealised construction of Islam in which the duty of every Muslim is to care for all of humanity, irrespective of belief, or lack thereof. The difficulty with this construction is that it does not appear to correspond with the Islam pupils see in the media, both abroad, where so often Muslim is seen to be in conflict with fellow Muslim, and also in the United Kingdom, where so often Muslims are seen to be in conflict with contemporary society. In reality one is led to believe that there are diverse constructions of Islam and that many Muslims and non-Muslims alike would not recognize the sanitized construction of Islam which Hussein and Jordan present, and which appears to be indebted to the social cohesion agenda.

The textbooks by Victor Watton, like Hussein and Jordan, look at the role of religion in society and in the world. However, it is difficult to determine the construction of Islam that is presented in Religion and Life and Religion and Society. As we have noted, both were written for the Edexcel GCSE syllabus, and for those students who were preparing for one or both of these units. The textbooks, and the syllabus, seek to put forward religious responses to issues of societal and global concern. Because students are asked to reflect on these issues from the perspective of Christianity and one other religion, the textbooks offer a more in depth response from the Christian perspective than those of
other faiths. Nonetheless, Muslim responses to the issues tend to be extremely positive. And so in Watton’s *Religion and Life* an idealised portrait of family life in Islam is offered. The benefits of stable family are stated, along with the understanding of children as a ‘gift from God’. Positive quotations from the Qur’an and the Hadith are given to stress the importance of marriage and, more often, to present a positive picture of the place of women. Watton’s superficial portrayal suggests an idealised image of family life and of the place of women and does not even raise the possibility that this construction may not be the reality for many.

In a very brief section on ‘Islam and Racial Harmony’, which covers barely half a page in *Religion and Life*, we are given a number of quotations from Muslim ‘thinkers’ about the evils of racism. We are also presented with quotations from the Qur’an and Hadith stressing the unity of humankind. He begins the section, however, with a sentence which surely deserves greater examination: ‘Muslims believe that Islam is a united community (Ummah) and that there can be no room for racism *when all races are united in the one religion*’ (50) (italics mine). A similar introduction when dealing with ‘Islam and other Religions’ surely deserves greater analysis, ‘... Islam sees itself as the only true religion and Muslims feel that they have a duty to help people avoid hell by leading them to become Muslim’ (56). The same occurs in the section entitled ‘Teachings on Forgiveness and Reconciliation’ Watton stresses the duty of the Muslim to forgive but then goes on to state that: ‘Muslims should not forgive those who are working against Islam, or those who are denying Muslim principles’ (86). These throwaway statements, which are actually saying something profound and potentially challenging, are left without any further comment or examination. One wonders whether this is the result of the social cohesion agenda, or simply an attempt by the author to construct an Islam which is as innocuous as possible.

Watton’s *Religion and Society* similarly deals with religious responses to a variety of issues: Rights and responsibilities; Environmental and medical issues, Peace and conflict and Crime and punishment. Perhaps interestingly the section on ‘Rights and responsibilities’ only deals with Christianity (as does this particular unit in the exam). In many of the other sections it is difficult to conclude whether Watton is seeking to give a positive construction of Islam or not, he simply states a series of facts about Muslim
attitudes to the issues in question. In the section on ‘Peace and conflict’ there is a very brief section on how religious organisations try to promote world peace. On this page we are given summary of how a variety of religious organisations work for world peace. It is perhaps significant, and an attempt to dispel a negative stereotype, that the only organisation whose manifesto is quoted in isolation to other faiths is the Muslim Peace Fellowship, and which includes the objective: ‘To expose the falsehood of the popular stereotype that Islam is a religion that teaches terrorism and violence’ (65). In a sense it is something of a distortion to highlight the credo of the Muslim Peace Fellowship, given their pacifist agenda. This is recognised later in the book when Watton attempts to unpack the Muslim concept of a just war.

In dealing with bullying, Watton’s conclusion is a little confusing, perhaps born out of his desire to always show Islam in a positive light. We are presented with two passages from the Qur’an, neither of which appear to have anything to say directly about bullying (Qur’an 3: 104-105; 90: 12-16). He presents us with a series of statements detailing why bullying is regarded as sinful, but often these statements seem to relate directly to behaviour between Muslims. For example:

Islam teaches that all Muslims are members of the Ummah and should have equal treatment and respect. Any Muslim who bullies a fellow Muslim is acting against the Ummah. (79).

Watton’s attempt to relate this to bullying in general is unconvincing:

Muhammad said in his final sermon, ‘Every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim’. No-one should bully their brother and so Muslims should not bully anyone (79) (italics mine).

When dealing with the potentially awkward issues of Islamic law, we have the definition of Shari’ah as, ‘...a system of justice based on courts with strict rules about how everyone should be treated fairly by the courts’ (98). Nothing is said of the way in which Shari’ah is played out in some Islamic countries, which students will have doubtless heard about or read of. Instead Watton is keen to stress the equality of all before the law, and the work of groups like Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief in seeking to bring justice to the world. Here, as elsewhere, one could argue that there is distortion by omission.
With the exception of Hussein and Jordan and Watton the text books in the sample say little about the impact of Islam in the world today, other than by stressing that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. Nor do they tend to offer much in respect of the role of Muslims in society. In a section entitled ‘Islam today’ Angela Wood glibly states that:

Islam is in the news almost every day. There may be news items about the actions of governments in Islamic countries, the actions of Muslims who are public figures in Britain today, Muslims in a certain area at school or work, or the relationship between particular Muslim parents and children, or husbands and wives. (60)

In reality it is most likely that news items pupils will be exposed to will portray Islam in a negative light and will probably concern war or terrorism. In general this is never tackled by the text books in our sample written by non-Muslims, although Wood does include a task in which pupils are asked to assess media representations of Islam. Aylett and O’Donnell mention that the news often shows images of ‘extremists’ groups, using violence ‘in the name of God’, but that these no more represent Islam than do Protestant and Catholic terrorists in Northern Ireland represent Christianity, although the analogy is not really a good one. ‘Every religion has its extremists’ (7) it concludes. The same analogy is found in Victor Watton’s Religion and Society (66). In both cases the analysis is both brief and superficial. One is left with the impression that terrorism is ignored or given shallow treatment so as not to offend, and for fear or reinforcing negative stereotypes. In reality by not tackling these difficult issues the danger is that such negative stereotypes, if they exist, are strengthened. There is a disparity between what pupils see in the media, and what the text books tell them.

Of all the text books the one which deals most comprehensively with terrorism is the one book co-written by a Muslim. Hussein and Jordan have a section entitled ‘Terrorism and Islam’. It mentions 9/11 (they even include a photograph of the second plane crashing into the twin towers) and the concept of suicide bombers, and compares Islamic teaching with the idea of terrorism. It also draws on an analogy with Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. They tell us that in Islam self-sacrifice can be justified in very extreme circumstances: ‘If a person has no other way to defend themselves, are facing certain death anyway, and are able to help others survive by sacrificing themselves’ (61). They
conclude that terrorism is un-Islamic and imply that those who perpetrate acts are terror, although they might claim to be Muslim, are in fact not! One wonders whether such a facile response to the reality of terrorism, and those who perpetrate acts of terror in the name of Islam, would convince well informed students. Whilst one might argue, quite correctly, that most Muslims would condemn terrorism, there is no doubt that there are those who would seek to justify acts of terror and claim to be Muslim. Surely this complex topic deserves more comprehensive treatment if negative stereotyping and Islamophobia are to be addressed.

**Conclusion**

The review of the literature had highlighted a concern by some Muslim writers that text books written by non-Muslims might be guilty of distorting Islam thus creating the possibility for greater negative stereotyping. The sample would suggest that this is not the case. Writers of text books, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, along with those who produce audio-visual material, appear to distort by overcompensating, portraying Islam as consensual and devoid of conflict. This is a construction in which the positive is always stressed, even at the expense of other cultures or faiths, and where difficult issues are either glossed over or ignored altogether. One could conclude that this is a form of distortion which appears to occur in resources from Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Those who produce this material appear always keen to promote the positive but in so doing they are in danger of constructing a form of Islam which is idealised, but which is not always played out in reality. The danger is that students, when confronted with the alternative construction of Islam in the media, may come to the conclusion that the Islam that is constructed for educational purposes is a fallacy, leading to the possibility of greater stereotyping of Muslims, the very phenomena that it is seeking to address.

**4.37 Too much material?**

Jackson (1997) had concluded that some Religious Education text books attempted to cover too much material, particularly those who adopted a thematic approach. This, he argued, led to the possibility of confusion, superficiality and oversimplification. In
general, amongst the few who commented on this point at interview, there was broad agreement with Jackson’s conclusion.

Teacher 1:2, when commenting on the disparity between the room given for Christianity and Islam in the books by Victor Watton, previously mentioned, argued that this was partly due to the fact that ‘in the text books they have got to fit in all of the other religions’. Watton’s text books deal with the response of Christianity and one other religion to a number of themes. Christianity is always given the longest response with the remaining religions given very little space.

Teacher 2:3 agreed with Jackson’s claim of superficiality, but justified this on the grounds that the text books were ‘trying to make it a simplified version of the religion.’

**Conclusion**

Content analysis of text books would suggest that Jackson’s charge of superficiality is not without foundation. All of the text books in the sample attempt to cover the topic of Islam in relatively few words. Sue Penney, for example, covers this whole topic in less than 50 pages, much of which is given over to pictures. Of the other text books, with the exception of Watton, Keene is the most lengthy at 96 pages, with the rest around 60 pages long. Both of Watton’s books are longer, but they contain material relating to the themes that are being covered, along with responses from other world faiths. The material on Islam is sparse and superficial. The amount of material that each text book attempts to cover often means that only the barest ‘facts’ can be presented and, as has been previously mentioned, there is no room for diversity, deviation, conflict or debate, leading to a construction of Islam which is consensual, devoid of conflict or contradiction, and therefore distorted.
5. Evaluation and Conclusion
Introduction

The aims of the research project were, as follows:

1. To explore the extent to which the construction of Islam in the classroom is determined by outside influences such as exam boards, curriculum mongers, text books and other resources. In this context to investigate whether the construction of Islam leans towards a Western-Christian construction.

2. To assess whether the community cohesion agenda leads to a construction of Islam that is diverse and fluid, or one which is consensual and static: and to examine whether, in a bid to dispel negative stereotypes, and for the purpose of community cohesion, a ‘socially acceptable’ Islam is constructed.

3. To explore whether this constrains teachers, or whether they willingly accommodate or reject this construction.

4. To investigate the extent to which pedagogy influences construction and whether the dominance of a phenomenological approach leads to a consensual construction of Islam which ignores the controversial and disregards conflicting issues of truth.

The project sought to investigate these questions by semi-structured interviews with teachers engaged in the teaching of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4; observing lessons in which Islam was being taught; and a content analysis of syllabuses, schemes of work, policy documents, lesson plans, text books, work sheets and other resources used in the teaching of Islam.
5.1 Evaluation

5.11 Have the research questions been answered?
The research project sought to discover how Islam was constructed for educational purposes at Key Stages 3 and 4, not least in the light of the community cohesion agenda. The extent to which the questions have been answered will be given a more detailed examination in the conclusion below. In summary, the research found that teachers were constrained by a number of factors in the construction of Islam. These are detailed below under three main headings: Constraints and Construction; Pedagogy and Construction; and Resources and Construction. The construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4 was what has been termed here as ‘curriculum Islam’, a construction which presents Islam as consensual and lacking in diversity, a ‘safe’ vision of Islam in which areas of conflict or controversy are ignored and where a positive image of Islam is presented.

5.12 The original contribution to knowledge

This research should not be regarded in isolation but as part of a continuum. The literature review in chapter 2 raised the issues which led to the formulation of the aims which are at the heart of this research project. In many ways this project is a contribution to an ongoing debate about the teaching of Islam in schools: How is Islam constructed, and by whom? Is it a construction dominated by a Western-Christian understanding of Islam, or one which derives from the perspective of the Muslim believer (and even then, which Muslim believer?). Nonetheless, the research project makes an original contribution to the debate in that it is written post 2007 and reflects upon the construction of Islam in the light of the community cohesion agenda. The research, therefore, considers the impact of community cohesion on publishers, exam boards and curriculum mongers, and on teachers, and reflects upon whether this, along with other factors, leads to a distorted construction of Islam. The research concludes that the desire to engender community cohesion, along with attempts to overcompensate for the negative portrayal of Islam in the media, and to counteract negative stereotyping, leads to ‘curriculum Islam’, which is a distortion.
5.13 Limitations of the thesis

The limitations of the research methods were considered in some detail in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, it is imperative that consideration is given to a critical reflection of the whole research project, and not merely that which relates to methodology. In this respect consideration was given to the research aims: Were they too broad, overambitious, or too loosely focussed and restrictive? The aims emerged and developed over a long period of time, from the genesis of this project, which resulted in the first assignment for the EdD, through assignments 2 and 3, reaching their final conclusion in this thesis. There was, therefore, a process through which the aims changed and evolved after much reflection and deliberation. Ultimately I was left with four aims, which were considered neither too broad nor too restrictive, but which sought to answer the overarching question: What is the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4?

It is acknowledged that a potential limitation of the project lay in the size and geographical location of the sample. All of the schools in the sample were located in the South East of England, and in areas which were not ethnically diverse. What is represented in this research project are the views of teachers working in schools and communities where there are not large numbers of Muslims. Although some of the schools had small (but not insignificant) numbers of Muslim pupils, they were always a minority. Indeed, it is recognised that this research project reflects the concerns of particular teachers in a particular location, and is to some extent limited by this. Nonetheless, the sample raised some important and original data in its reflections of teachers’ perceptions of community cohesion, and on the teaching of Islam, in areas where there is little community diversity. Indeed, I would argue that the originality of this research lies in the fact I had a group of teachers working outside the multi-cultural arena and for whom the community cohesion agenda might differ from those in areas of ethnic and religious diversity. Within this sample there appeared to be an emphasis on the importance of subject specialism and the belief that Religious Education was justified in the curriculum on its own merit as an academic subject, without the need for politically-motivated justification.
5.14 Possibilities for future research

It has been noted above that this research should be regarded as part of a continuum, contributing to an ongoing debate about the teaching of Islam in schools. Whilst it offers some original insights in the light of the community cohesion agenda, its limitations are also acknowledged. Further research might include a larger and more diverse sample, not least including geographical areas where there are larger Muslim communities. Other research methods might be considered, for example the use of questionnaires and focus groups to enable a larger research sample. The views of pupils might also garner some interesting data, not least in exploring their understanding of Islam. In some ways this future research is already underway; the recently published Warwick Report, which is considered below, reflects upon resources used in the teaching of world religions in the light of the community cohesion agenda.

5.2 Conclusion

The conclusions reached will be discussed under three headings: Constraints and Construction; Pedagogy and Construction and Resources and Construction. I will then offer some reflections on the Warwick Report (2010), which was published as this project was about to be completed.

5.21 Constraints and Construction

‘Community Cohesion’

Social or community cohesion is a term used in social policy and sociology to refer to the bonds which draw a community together, often used in the context of cultural diversity. The concept itself is diverse and is dependent on context, and so difficult to give a precise definition. The origin of the concept is also complex, although many sociologists acknowledge the importance of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Emile
Durkheim (1858-1917) as crucial in its emergence as a sociological conception.

In fact the origin of the notion of social cohesion goes back much further, to the Islamic philosopher-historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), who, in his theoretical prolegomena to the study of history, the *Muqaddima*, introduces a concept which he calls *asabiyah* (Rosenthal, 2005). Generally translated as ‘social cohesion’, this neologism permeates all of Khaldun’s writing and refers to the bond of cohesion which exists among human beings in a group forming a community. Ibn Khaldun argues that each civilization has within itself the seeds of its own destruction as *asabiyah* becomes diluted, only to be eventually replaced by new dynasties with a stronger sense of *asabiyah*. In his view all dynasties were doomed to destruction within five generations. Ibn Khaldun was seeking to understand what it was that kept societies and communities together and does so in the context of the crisis that was occurring in the Islam of his time. The glory days of Muhammad and the conquests of Islam appeared to be in the past. Christianity was once more on the rise, not least in Ibn Khaldun’s ancestral Spanish homeland. The last Abbasid Caliph, al-Musta'sim-Billah Abu-Ahmad Abdullah bin al-Mustansir-Billah, had been killed in Baghdad in 1258 following the Mongol invasions, rolled up in a blanket and trampled to death. Islam was fragmenting. It was facing a crisis and Ibn Khaldun was seeking to make sense of this. It is, perhaps not surprising that his work is first translated in the West in the mid 19th century in France, at a time when concerns prevailed over the perceived fragmentation of French society.

Community cohesion became an important theme in British social policy after riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001. These riots, which had racial overtones, led to David Blunkett, then British Home Secretary, commissioning a report chaired by Ted Cantle which led to the publication of *Community Cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team* (Home Office, 2001). The Runnymede Trust referred to 2002 as a year in which cohesion moved to the forefront of the race debate in the United Kingdom (Runnymede Trust, 2003). The impetus for community cohesion, therefore, came about in the context of a fear over the perceived fragmentation of society in Britain. It is not surprising that the Government’s imposition of a community cohesion agenda on schools from 2007, and its importance on the teaching of Religious Education, came in
the wake of the horrors of 9/11 and 7/7 and the view that Islamic extremism resulted from a perception among young Muslims that they were marginalised from society. This is implied in Ofsted (2007) in its acknowledgement that the emphasis on community cohesion reflected the changing social reality of religion in society (Ofsted, 2007: 39). In the light of this it is difficult to regard the community cohesion agenda as being anything other than politically motivated and an attempt to create or enhance a sense of common belonging in a society that was believed to be fragmented, and designed to counteract the potential for extremism, not least among the Muslim community. If this analysis is correct there are clear implications for Religious Education, and for the construction of Islam in an educational context.

Interviews revealed that, with the exception of School 6, community cohesion did not have a high priority among Religious Education teachers. Whilst many acknowledged the importance of Religious Education in creating respect, understanding and empathy for diverse religious traditions, few referred to the concept of social cohesion. Indeed, most had not heard of it! Teachers reacted to community cohesion in a variety of ways: from openly hostile to supportive. At one end of the extreme teachers believed this to be a political agenda which was not the purpose of Religious Education. For example, teacher 2:1 argued that Religious Education had a justification of its own on purely anthropological grounds. Others argued that Religious Education was important to enable students to make sense of their own lives, and to reflect upon life’s ‘big issues’. Even at School 6, where the head of department was enthusiastic about community cohesion, she did not state this as a reason why Religious Education should be taught. The Warwick Report, which will be reflected in more detail later, appears to confirm this in its view that, ‘community cohesion is not conceptualised generally as a top priority among the aims of religious educators’ (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 2010: 213). Nonetheless, teachers did acknowledge that they felt pressure to present an acceptable vision of Islam, in which controversial or difficult issues are ignored. Although there were many factors which influenced this, community cohesion was among them.
Syllabuses and Examinations

It was previously noted that of the locally agreed syllabuses in the sample, four of the schools relied on one that had not been updated since 2005, and which did not reflect the social cohesion agenda. The remaining two faith schools only loosely adapted a recently-revised syllabus. The Edexcel GCSE syllabus reflects community cohesion from 2009-2010, but this was after data was collected. Nonetheless, it is the view of this research project that syllabuses clearly affect, one might argue distort, the construction of Islam, and that social cohesion, even if it is not explicit, is implicit in them.

Locally agreed syllabuses used at the schools in the sample present broad aims and attainment targets. They suggest that a thematic approach will be taken; in the case of the syllabus used by schools 2, 3, and 4, and adapted by 1, by presenting a list of themes that are to be the basis of Religious Education across the curriculum. These are very broad, like ‘beliefs and values’ or ‘celebrations and ceremonies’. Themes are also central to the syllabus adapted by schools 5 and 6, although in this case the themes change at each key stage. Given the dominance of this thematic approach in the locally agreed syllabuses, it is not surprising that the teaching in the schools in the sample was dominated by a thematic and phenomenological approach. This also presupposes a Western understanding of religion, as phenomenon that can be broken down into themes, which express a Western understanding of what a ‘religion’ is (I’Anson, 2010). Such a view would support the conclusion of Walshe and Copley (2001) who argued that in respect of a study of Jesus, agreed syllabuses presented a figure who was seen devoid of cultural context and a vehicle for, and expression of, Western values. The Jesus of the agreed syllabuses is ‘slotted with apparent ease into modern secular themes and contexts’ (Walshe and Copley, 2001: 39). The argument in this study is that the approach to the study of Islam reflects a Western-Christian understanding of what constitutes a religion, and as such is a distortion.

This was even more glaring at Key Stage 4 in respect of the Edexcel GCSE, studied at schools 1 and 2. The syllabus undertaken at these two schools require students to study religious responses from Christianity and one other religion to a variety of issues. At
schools 1 and 2 Islam is chosen as the second religion. However, Christianity dominates the course (and Western Christianity at that), and the themes clearly represent issues which might be considered important from a Western perspective, for example: social harmony; social responsibility, medical ethics. In respect of Islam (or Christianity for that matter) there is little scope for diversity; pupils are only expected to know the views of ‘most Muslims’ and ‘some Muslims’. At any event students are not learning about Islam, rather the response of Islam to certain issues. As such the Edexcel syllabus, and those of its kind, do not deal with sensitive or controversial issues within or between religions. The Edexcel syllabuses construction of Islam in terms of its consensual responses to often non-religious issues is a distortion of the faith.

Public examinations and the pressure to achieve good grades represented a major constraint on teachers. This led to a construction of Islam which was dominated by the set text books for the exam, endorsed by the exam board, and written by the chief examiner. In these texts Islam is generally presented as consensual, and Shi’a and Sunni Islam are not even mentioned. Indeed, although pupils are required to know the responses of ‘some Muslims’ and ‘most Muslims’ for the examination, they are not even introduced to the concepts of Sunni and Shi’a. As we have seen, such is the pressure of examination success, that the construction of Islam consists of a brief, consensual response to an issue, along with the rote learning of key words and definitions in order to achieve marks in the exam.

5.22 Pedagogy and Construction

The dominance of the phenomenological approach

The research indicated that the phenomenological approach to the study of religion was preponderant across the sample. This was often allied to a thematic study of religions, itself not surprising given the nature of the locally agreed syllabuses and the Edexcel syllabus noted above. The dominance of a phenomenological and thematic approach was further confirmed by content analysis of schemes of work and lesson plans. Whilst
teachers tended to use more variety in respect of pedagogy at Key Stage 3, this ceased to be the case at Key Stage 4, when the emphasis was on getting good grades. Even at Key Stage 3, where more variety occurred, the content analysis suggested that a phenomenological and thematic approach was dominant. This study argues that the phenomenological approach seeks to understand “the other” from ones’ own perspective, a perspective which is a Western-Christian construct (l’Anson, 2010). A Muslim might argue that Islam cannot be constructed by means of a series of phenomena, or understood alongside other religions by way of a thematic approach, because to do so is to limit Islam which is both a noun and a verb. The understanding of Islam from the Western perspective, and the sharp division between the secular and sacred in Western thought, does not take account of Islam’s self-understanding in which this dichotomy does not exist (Zaki, 1982).

The research indicated that the phenomenological approach contributed to confusion among pupils, particularly in those schools where six or more religions were studied. Teachers consistently acknowledged that pupils often became confused about which major beliefs belonged to which religion. For those studying Islam and Christianity at Key Stage 4 there was a particular problem because of common ideas in both faiths. Only at school 3 did teachers argue that confusion did not occur, although further questioning suggested that there was indeed some confusion there too.

Barnes (2001) had argued that the phenomenological approach implied that all religions are essentially the same, and ignores competing issues of truth. This study agrees with Barnes’ hypothesis, which appeared to be confirmed by the data. Teachers acknowledged that competing issues of truth were largely ignored, partly as a result of the pedagogical approach that dominated, and partly to prevent controversy or conflict. This latter point was particularly pertinent in respect of Islam and in the construction of a consensual Islam, devoid of controversy or conflict. The potential danger of the community cohesion agenda is that it may exacerbate this further. Despite the advice from government that emphasises the importance of diversity within and between religions, it also talks about ‘shared values’ (DCSF, 2007:8). It is the concept of ‘shared values’ which appears to dominate the phenomenological and thematic approach in
schools and divergent, often controversial issues of truth, are ignored. Although one teacher argued that all religions are basically the same, and disagreed with Barnes’ hypothesis, the consensus was that issues of truth were ignored, and a ‘safe’ portrayal of religions was presented. Hayward (2006) had demonstrated that Religious Education often played the role of apologetic, showing all religions as a safe and good thing. This research project clearly indicated that this was true in the teaching of Islam. Teachers felt constrained by pressure to play down the controversial, and they felt that this was doing pupils a disservice. This pressure came from the community cohesion agenda (and the emphasis on shared values); syllabuses (which gave little scope for divergent issues of truth); from schools and from parents.

‘Curriculum Islam’

Hayward had suggested that in Religious Education religions were portrayed as though they were homogeneous, devoid of conflict and controversy, and often deferred to the dominant tradition. In her analysis, in the context of Christianity, she named the construction ‘Curriculum Christianity’. This research concludes that ‘Curriculum Islam’ also exists. Curriculum Islam presents the faith as being consensual, and homogeneous. It also ignores the potentially controversial so as to present an ‘acceptable face’ of Islam. An analysis of schemes of work and lesson plans suggests that Islam is perceived from the viewpoint of the dominant, Sunni tradition. There is little, in some cases no, discussion of diversity, and one is left with the impression that all Muslims believe the same thing and act in the same way.

Teachers indicated that they felt constrained to present Islam as consensual and homogeneous. One of the constraints related to the limitations of syllabuses, which has already been highlighted. Another constraint related to a feeling among teachers that if Islam was taught as diverse it might confuse students. One wonders the extent to which this view is influenced by Piaget and Goldman et al, and their understanding of what pupils can intellectually cope with at different stages of cognitive development. Teachers also felt that Islam was taught as though consensual and homogeneous in order to counteract negative images of conflict within Islam presented in the media. In
addition teachers felt compelled to present a positive view of Islam in order to compensate for the negative stereotyping of Islam in the media, from parents, and from pupils, and to counter Islamophobia. All of the teachers in the sample indicted that they ‘overcompensated’ when teaching Islam in order to present it as ‘safe’ and ‘a good thing’, even, on occasion, acknowledging that they were more likely to show negative aspects of Christianity than they were of Islam. Difficult issues were often ignored so as not to cause offence, either to Muslims in the class, or in the wider community. The conclusion of this research is that this construction of Islam is a distortion.

**Text-based learning and word based activities**

The research revealed that text based learning was a common activity in the teaching of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4. Whilst a variety of teaching methods tended to be used at Key Stage 3, including some experiential work, the schemes of work indicated that across the sample text books were widely employed in most lessons. Even at school 3, where the head of department claimed text books were not used, the evidence from observations and from schemes of work suggested otherwise. Given the content of the text books involved, discussed below, this is particularly problematic. At Key Stage 4 the text books dominate the teaching, particularly those books endorsed by the examination board. Lesson observations indicated that pupils were more engaged in those lessons where a variety of methods were employed, and appeared bored when the lesson was dominated by the text book. Of equal concern was the emphasis on learning key words, often simple definitions to complex concepts, which was preponderant across the board, but which was particularly prevalent at Key Stage 4, for the purpose of the examination.

The lack of attention afforded to primary sources, other than a few quotations in text books (often de-contextualised), was surprising given the centrality in Islam of the Qur’an, as the final word of God, and the Hadith, the Sunnah of the Prophet, was surprising. Teachers argued that at Key Stage 3 this would be too complex for the pupils, and at Key Stage 4 it was not necessary for the examination!
5.23 Resources and Construction

An analysis of text books and audiovisual materials used for the teaching of Islam merely exacerbates the issues above, constructing Islam as consensual, homogeneous and devoid of contradiction. Diversity often entailed no more than a brief mention of Sunni and Shi’a, and the construction was from the dominant Sunni tradition. Furthermore, the text books in the sample presented a largely superficial construction of Islam which ignores potentially contentious issues and portrays Islam in a positive light, often to the detriment of other religious traditions.

A positive account of Islamic history

The origin of Islam is regarded very much from the perspective of the Muslim believer, indeed on this point it cannot be said that a Western understanding of Islam is being presented. There are inherent problems with constructing the origins of Islam, not least because written accounts of pre-Islamic and early-Islamic history do not appear for the first 150 years of Islamic history, further compounded by the fact that they were compiled by Muslim believers (Berkey, 2003: 39-40). The accounts of the origin of Islam given in the text books treat Islamic tradition as though it were fact. The conventional account of the rise of Islam is presented without question, and we are told that Muhammad definitely had visions of the Archangel Jibril, that he was God’s final messenger, and so forth. Rarely is this prefixed with ‘Muslims believe that …’ other than, interestingly, in the one book co-written by a Muslim! No account is made of much contemporary scholarship which debates the emergence and formation of Islam, a construction which takes place over a long period of time, and which is dependent upon the cultures and religious beliefs in and around the Arabian Peninsula, not least the influence of Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism (Berkey, 2003; Hodgson, 1974; Lapidus, 1982). One would think that an understanding of the construction of Islam in this way, in which Islam is seen in relation to Christianity and Judaism, would help in the aspiration for community cohesion and shared values.
The research revealed that the history of Islam in the text books gave a particularly positive spin on Islamic history and the controversial was often ignored or given superficial treatment (for example the military conquests of the early Islamic community), or where Islam is seen in a positive light (in its treatment of the Crusades where merciful Islam is compared with brutal Christianity).

**Islamic values and Western values**

The text books have a tendency to portray Islamic values in a positive light in contrast to Western values, particularly in areas such as family, charity, sexual ethics. Potentially controversial issues like women’s rights are generally ignored, or given superficial treatment. Indeed, difficult or controversial issues are largely omitted from text books. The positive presentation of Islam, along with the avoidance of controversial issues, could be regarded as ‘overcompensating’ in order to dispel negative stereotyping of Islam.

**Phenomenology**

Text books take a phenomenological approach to the study of Islam, further exacerbating the issues with construction outlined above. This is particularly pertinent when one considers the dominance of text-based learning previously discussed.

**Outdated text books**

A number of the text books in the sample were fairly old and outdated. Indeed, out of the nine text books subjected to content analysis, which constituted the major texts used across the sample, six were written before 2000. In general, therefore, the text books were written before the events of 9/11 and 7/7, and thus do not reflect contemporary concerns or agenda.
5.3 The Warwick Report

The Research Report *Materials used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England* resulted from a study which was carried out by the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, and which sought to investigate the materials used in both primary and secondary schools in the teaching of world religions. It was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The research was carried out during the academic year 2008-9, and the report published in 2010. The publication appeared as the writing up of this research project was nearing completion, and so too late to be included in the main text. However, the following offers some reflections on the Warwick Report, particularly where it relates to the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4.

The Warwick project reviewed the teaching of the six major world religions and concerned itself with published materials used in the teaching of world religions; pedagogical factors which led to the choice of materials and the way in which they were used in the classroom; and the materials’ contribution to learning, particularly in the context of community cohesion. The methodology was divided into three interrelated strands.

- An audit of available books produced since 2000 and of ICT materials used to teach Religious Education in schools. A review of a sample of these materials was undertaken by academics specialising in each religion, professional Religious Education specialists from each Key Stage, and faith consultants from each religion, and an examination of additional materials by the same groups that were identified in strands two and three, outlined below. The findings were then appraised and issues and recommendations highlighted.

- The second strand consisted of qualitative case studies, consisting of interviews with teachers and groups of pupils, focus groups, lesson observations, and a review of school policy documents. This research took place in a sample of 10 primary and 10 secondary schools, selected on the basis of school type (faith or non-faith, independent, academy etc.) and demography.
Strand three consisted of a postal and online survey of a random sample of 2,723 schools. The response rate to this survey was very low (23%).

The materials, including text books, audio visual material, and ICT, dated from 2000 onwards. In this respect six of the text books in the present research project would not have been included, having been written before that date.

The Warwick Report represents an important contribution to the debate regarding the construction of Islam, and there some interesting correlations between their research and this research project. However, there are also areas of divergence. At the outset it is important to acknowledge that Warwick was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Although it acknowledges the independence of its findings, it begins with the premise that the community cohesion agenda is a good thing. My own research indicated that many teachers were uneasy with what they perceived to be a ‘political agenda’ behind the raison d’être for the teaching of Religious Education.

**Text Books and Resources**

My own research demonstrates that text books on Islam generally presented a distortion of the faith, portraying Islam as consensual and homogenous, ignoring or distorting the controversial, and displaying a morally superior Islam in contrast to ‘corrupt and perverted’ Western values. In contrast Warwick is generally positive about text books and resources employed for the teaching of world religions.

Warwick found that many of the books used at Key Stage 3 tended to be textbooks written specifically to meet curriculum concerns of Religious Education (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 43). In general these fell into series, with distinct books on each religion, or those that were thematic in their approach. In respect of cultural understanding Warwick concludes that the content of text books were generally positive in this respect. It was particularly noted that text books on Islam showed positive images of young Muslims in the world, and of Muslim women, ‘which may dispel assumptions among some students’ (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 47). My own research suggests that in only portraying positive images text books were in fact distorting, and that this
‘image’ of Islam would not resonate with what pupils had heard and seen about Islam. My research argues that a more balanced approach is needed.

**Distortion and Consensus**

I have suggested that resources largely fail to acknowledge diversity within Islam, and therefore present Islam from the perspective of the dominant Sunni tradition. Although Warwick generally commends the accuracy of resources, particularly those relating to Islam, it does express concern about frequent inaccuracies in the way in which religions are represented in resources. This was particularly evident in respect of internal divisions within religions. There were examples where Shi’a and Sunni distinctions were well handled, but also occasions where religious distinctions were confused (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. *et al.*, 90). Warwick also comments on significant omissions when dealing with religious traditions which ‘skewed’ the representation of the faith (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. *et al.*, 91).

My own research demonstrated that most of the resources on Islam were produced by non-Muslims. Although I conclude that resources by Muslims are also problematic, there is often a tendency in non-Muslim resources to view Islam through the lens of a different tradition. Warwick, although generally positive in regard of accuracy, does acknowledge that this was sometimes compromised by a tendency in some texts to present a religion through the lens of another tradition. For example, in a book on Islam it is contended that evil was created by *shaytan*, a fallen angel. This is a Christian understanding and not an Islamic one (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. *et al.*, 92). In this respect Warwick concurs with the my own findings.

**Oversimplification and Generalisation**

My own research argues that resources often present a superficial portrayal of Islam, and one which often ignores the controversial. This simplistic understanding tends to generalise and regards Islam as consensual and lacking in diversity. This, I argue, leads to distortion.

Whereas Warwick suggests that some simplification of religions in text books is necessary to enable understanding, it argues that there are numerous occasions when
simplification leads to distortion (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 93). Similarly, generalisation was also a cause for concern, where one is given the impression that all members of a religion conform to certain beliefs and practices. The Muslim reviewers, whilst generally positive of the resources on Islam, felt that they tended to be too simplistic and needed to engage with Islam at a far deeper level (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 110). Warwick expresses concern about the low levels of scholarship represented in many of the text books (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 217). In this respect it would appear as though Warwick concurs with my own findings.

Community Cohesion

My research concluded that many teachers were not well disposed to the community cohesion agenda. However, it was clear that this agenda was one of the factors which constrained teachers, not least because it had found its way into exam and locally agreed syllabi.

Whilst the Key Stage 3 books in Warwick’s sample predated the responsibility of schools to promote community cohesion, and it did not appear to be explicit in them, areas covered in them such as ‘common humanity’, ‘home and family’, ‘human rights’, might implicitly assist community cohesion (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 55). However, Warwick argues that the positive role of religions in creating community cohesion was less strong in the text books in relation to Islam (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 47). At Key Stage 4 community cohesion was more prevalent, but generally only by presenting information rather than encouraging reflection. It was noted that sensitive handling of issues like Islamic fundamentalism and the impact of Islamophobia enabled the potential for the dispelling of ignorance and contributing to community cohesion, but only if it were drawn out by good teaching (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 61). There appeared to be little in the text books at Key Stage 4 which affirmed the concept of ‘shared humanity’ and those things which religions have in common (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 65). Indeed, Warwick concludes that the demands of the examination is dominant in text books at Key Stage 4, rather than an aspiration for community cohesion, a point which supports the conclusions reached in my own research.
Controversial Issues

Within my own sample it was evident that controversial issues in Islam were generally ignored or given superficial treatment. Warwick comes to a different conclusion, suggesting that controversial issues were covered in text books, including Islam and terrorism, suicide bombing and Jihad. In this respect there is a marked difference with the sample of books used in this study. This may well reflect the changed situation after 9/11 and 7/7, which occurred after most of the text books were written in my sample. Warwick commends the sensitive way in which terrorism and Islam is tackled in text books, in which it is compared with IRA activity in Ireland, and the assertion that it is not acceptable to Muslims (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 59). The contention of my research, however, is that such an argument (which was indeed made in one text book in my sample) is too simplistic and does nothing to further community cohesion, respect and understanding. Those who perpetrate terrorist acts in the name of Islam clearly believe that what they are doing is in the name of their religion. It is right to assert that for most Muslims terrorism is un-Islamic, and why, but to simply suggest that terrorists are not Muslims does little to further understanding of a complex issue, and to dispel negative stereotyping. To compare Islamic extremism with the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland is itself misleading since the situation in Ireland was based upon nationalist aspirations rather than religion, and whilst the complicated history of Ireland led to a religious dimension in the conflict where Catholics were identified with nationalism and Protestants with loyalist leanings, even this distinction is misleading since the earliest nationalists were, in fact, Protestant.

Warwick suggests that at Key Stage 4 controversial issues were covered in all but one of the 21 text books reviewed. These tended to relate to the ethical and moral issues which were pertinent to the examination, and less concerned with controversy between and within religions (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 70). Whilst contemporary issues involve engagement with controversial issues, Warwick felt that sometimes the concern to promote ‘right attitudes for community cohesion’ led writers of text books to play down the role of religion in situations of conflict (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 106). In this respect Warwick concurs with my own research.
Examinations

My research demonstrated that there were significant issues relating to text books written for the express purpose of public examinations, often endorsed by the exam board. This led to text books which were nothing more than a guide to exam success, and which pupils and teachers found to be tedious and boring. Warwick goes some way to endorsing this view. It argues that at Key Stage 4 most of the books in its sample were designed for use with the GCSE and were shaped by them. Warwick acknowledges that these books tend not to be particularly ‘engaging’ and suggest that teachers need to use them only as a resource and to create engaging activities (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 59). Indeed, Warwick argues that many of the text books for Key Stage 4 do not include activities appropriate to their target group. The dominant concern is comprehension, information giving, and testing, with the needs of the examination in mind (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 64). My own research commented on the rather turgid nature of text books at Key Stage 4, and was concerned that the dominant use of text books in lessons led to students becoming disengaged and bored.

Warwick argues that examination syllabi dictate the choice of text book adopted by schools, particularly in the case of ‘official books’ written by the chief examiner (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 151). Teachers in interview suggested that it was necessary to use these text books, but not to obsessively follow them because they are ‘functional’ rather than ‘inspiring’ and if they were used extensively it ‘would bore them to tears’ (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 151). Warwick notes that schools might buy a set of text books which they pedagogically disliked, but which were ‘practically useful’ (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 152). My own sample suggested, however, that teachers tended to rely heavily on these text books in order to enable exam success.

Warwick is critical of the way in which syllabi and exam requirements dictate ‘emphasis and balance’ within published materials, rather than the religions themselves. The examination, Warwick argues, is the shaping influence (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 94). Indeed, the report questions whether the ‘enthusiasm for presenting fashionable/contemporary’ issues prevalent in many examination syllabuses is
responsible for ‘skewing’ the representations of religions (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 95). On this point my own research concurs with Warwick.

Frequently, Warwick contends, the Key Stage 4 text books attempt to show something of the diversity of views within religions on controversial issues, but generally this entails giving two viewpoints for each, which may lead to oversimplification (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 65). Indeed, Warwick concludes that sometimes what is offered is a distorted picture of the religions being studied (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 203). My own study suggests that in only giving two viewpoints which, in the case of Islam, generally consists of ‘some Muslims’ and ‘most Muslims’, students are not being given an understanding of diversity within Islam, and this is a distortion.

Warwick agrees with my own research in acknowledging that the emphasis on the similarities and commonalities in most GCSE syllabi, and reflected in the text books, whilst positive at encouraging good relations across religions, could also have a distorting effect, and this was a concern (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 94).

Warwick argues that the emphasis on the moral and social dimension of religions in many Key Stage 4 courses leads to a presentation of faiths that is distorted, giving little attention to doctrinal issues or issues of belief (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 95). What Warwick appears to be suggesting is that conflicting issues of truth are generally ignored and that this creates a distortion, a point on which my own research would concur.

**Pedagogy**

My research demonstrated that text books often lent themselves to a phenomenological and thematic approach to the study of religions. They also often included tasks and activities which were too simplistic and that were not challenging. Warwick, on the other hand, suggests that the text books in their sample offered examples of both basic and unchallenging activities, as well as some imaginative and challenging activities. However, and in support of my own research, Muslim reviewers argued that the activities relating to Islam were often unchallenging and simplistic.
Warwick suggests that across the Key Stages a variety of pedagogical approaches were taken, but there was more variety at primary school level than at Key Stages 3 and 4 (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al 139 ff). At Key Stage 4 the dominant approach was what it calls ‘philosophical and ethical approaches’, which reflects the content of many GCSE courses. This tends to be key word driven (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 142), and often the content is geared around a theme, such as medical ethics, rather than a religion. There was a concern that sometimes resources actually lost site of the religion altogether (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 143). On this point Warwick comes to the same conclusion as my own research.

**Diversity**

My own research concludes that Islam is often presented as consensual and homogenous and that a positive image of Islam tends to be constructed in text books. Warwick commends those resources which present the diversity of religious traditions. However, in respect of Islam, the Muslim consultant, whilst welcoming presentations of Islam as diverse and global, was concerned that it was sometimes portrayed as an alien and foreign religion. The same consultant commented on one text book in which 90% of the images of Islam were of foreign places. Another Muslim consultant was concerned that many images of Muslims were from the Indian subcontinent, and could reinforce stereotype (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 98). Furthermore, there was a concern that many images of Muslims reflected poverty, natural disaster and persecution. This again was seen as a distortion which might reinforce stereotype. This negative presentation of Islam was not evident in my own sample, and on this point Warwick has come to a different conclusion. However, in relation to diversity Warwick did acknowledge that among the teachers that were interviewed there was a concern that text books on Islam had a tendency to present Islam as homogenous, implying that all Muslims believe the same thing (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 137), and on this point we are in agreement.

**Primary texts**

My research demonstrates that pupils never engage with primary texts and that this was a particular issue in respect of Islam, where the textual tradition is absolutely central. Students only came to the primary text through short passages, often taken out of
context, in text books. Warwick, on the other hand, commends text books for the preponderance of primary text in them. However, there was a concern that text is often taken out of context in order to fit in with the educational agenda, rather than giving an authentic portrayal of the religion (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 102). In respect of the Qur’an, text books were commended for quoting profusely, but often this was without context or understanding (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 103)

**Bias**

My own research demonstrates that in text books on Islam tradition is often treated as fact, and the phrase ‘Muslims believe …’ was rarely prefixed. One of the Christian reviewers in the Warwick project felt that texts were often biased against Christianity, arguing that the phrase, ‘Christians believe …’ was a qualifying term almost always used in respect of the Christian faith, but a similar qualifying phrase rarely used in respect of Islam (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 108). In books which included Christianity and Islam the phrase, ‘Christians believe that the Bible is the word of God’ was often used, but in relation to Islam the Qur’an was presented as the word of Allah without qualification. This supports the conclusion made in my own research.

**Recommendations**

Warwick makes a number of recommendations, among them a need to support teacher subject knowledge through dialogue with teachers, university academics, and members of faith communities. It also calls for a move away from studying religions through issues-based approaches and to explore ways in which an interest in learning about religions might be encouraged (Jackson, R; Ipgrave, J. et al, 218). On this point my own research would agree. Warwick stresses the importance of primary text, and calls upon educators to review the place of texts in the curriculum, and the development of textual interpretation as an important element in Religious Education. Again, this is an argument made in my own research.

Specifically in relation to resources, it recommends that publishers should adopt strict quality control procedures to prevent inaccuracy and distortion.
Conclusion

Whilst Warwick is generally positive about many of the resources used in the teaching of world religions it makes a number of points with which my own research would concur – not least the superficiality of some of the resources. Whilst it does not go quite so far as my own research in suggesting that resources assist in the construction of ‘Curriculum Islam’, a positive spin on Islam which is a distortion, Warwick does acknowledge that there is a tendency to present Islam as homogenous, and that tradition is sometimes treated as fact. Its comments on Key Stage 4 approaches to the study of religion would support the conclusions borne out by my own research.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

My research demonstrates that the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4 is a distortion and presents Islam as consensual, devoid of contradiction and conflict. The constraints on teachers from the community cohesion agenda, examination bodies and syllabuses, along with the desire to present a safe and acceptable Islam in order to redress Islamophobia and negative stereotyping, lead to the construction of ‘Curriculum Islam’ which is a misrepresentation. This study suggests that ‘Curriculum Islam’ is likely to increase Islamophobia and negative stereotyping, thus rendering social cohesion more difficult to achieve.

Halliday (1999) argues that Islamophobia itself is characterized by an understanding of Islam as static, lacking cultural diversity with and between Muslim communities. It fails to observe or understand the dynamic nature of the Islamic faith. This argument is supported by the Runnymede Trust (1997) in a report entitled, Islamophobia: a challenge for us all. This report speaks of open and closed views of Islam. Open views are based on an understanding and respect for Islam which, at the same time acknowledges disagreement within Islam, and allows for a critique of Islam and Muslims. Closed views are Islamophobic and consist of eight forms, which include an understanding of Islam as static and monolithic. And yet this is precisely how Islam is
constructed at Key Stages 3 and 4 in the misguided belief that it will help engender understanding and *dispel* negative stereotyping.

Claire Tinker (2006) argues that it is important to acknowledge potentially controversial issues in Islam, suggesting that it is not Islamophobic to state that Muslim women are ill-treated in some Muslim cultures and countries. It *is* Islamophobic to suggest that such treatment is normative in Islam. Tinker argues that it is important to acknowledge the *negative* in order to dispel negative stereotypes. And yet the construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4 ignores the negative in the belief that this will counter negative stereotypes. This research argues that the opposite will occur, as pupils seek to make sense of the conflicting constructions of Islam in the media and in the educational context. This point is raised in a recent article by Revell (2010), in relation to her research in primary education. She also calls for the construction of Islam education to take account of diversity.

Crick and Heater (1977), in their seminal work on politics and education, make some useful observations in relation to the teaching of politics, which may be helpful in reflecting how Islam might be constructed for educational purposes. In reflecting upon Christianity by way of analogy, they argue that whilst Christians may have much in common, one cannot treat their adherents seriously if the differences within the faith are ignored. Although there is always a case for toleration, they argue, there is never a case for ‘ecumenicity’ where all distinctions of doctrine are obliterated. Politics, they argue (and here I would want to claim Islam) needs to be taught realistically, or else it will lead to greater cynicism and disillusionment. It should present a balanced view which is not consensual, but which acknowledges conflict and contradiction as the way to create understanding.

This study suggests that an approach to Religious Education which ignores the conflicting or controversial in religion will do nothing to engender respect and understanding of religions, nor will it benefit the community cohesion agenda. Rather, religions need to be understood as complex and loose phenomenon which are not homogenous but diverse, conflicting, and dynamic. Conflicting issues of truth, both
within and between religions, are at the heart of religious belief and doctrine and should not be sacrificed on the altar of social cohesion and toleration.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

The Construction of Islam in English Secondary Schools

Interview Guide

The interviews were ‘semi-structured’ and so these questions constitute a guide rather than a schedule. The intention was that these would help facilitate a conversation.

General questions

- In your view what is the overriding purpose of Religious Education?
- A recent Ofsted report suggested that the purpose of RE is to help promote community cohesion and educate for diversity. Since 2007 it is an expectation that schools will promote community cohesion, and RE is said to have a special part to play in this. Would you agree? How important would you place this, and how do you think it is achieved?

Construction of the Syllabus

I want to try to find something out about the syllabus that you use here and the process for deciding on and implementing the syllabus.

- What syllabus do you use?
- Who decides on the syllabus and who puts it together? (For example SACRE).
- Is SACRE guided by national guidelines (presumably the National Curriculum guidelines for the core curriculum? Or the non-statutory framework)? There are then questions, of course, about who puts these guidelines together.
- In your view are there any particular strengths and weakness with the syllabus?
- Could you say something of the process that takes place from syllabus to scheme of work to lesson plan to lesson. Who is actually responsible at each stage? (In many ways these questions seek to understand who decides what constitutes a particular religion).
• How many religions are studied in the school? Do you perceive any issues of ‘overload’ or confusion when too many are studied, and how do you guard against this?

• How does Islam fit into the syllabus, in particular at what stage is it taught at this school?

**Pedagogy and Construction**

Having now some understanding of the syllabus and of what is taught I am interested to know how it is taught, so these questions are very much about pedagogy.

• Could you say something about the approach that you employ? Would you say it was a phenomenological approach? A thematic approach, experiential? Spiritual? Or a mixed methods approach?

• Would you say that this was the dominant approach in the school?

• Could you say something about what you think are the strengths of the approach, and perhaps any potential weaknesses?

• Thinking particularly about a thematic approach (if that is adopted) I wonder how you might guard against potential confusion?

• Reflecting on attainment targets A1 and A2 (learning from and learning about) I wonder if you could say something about the methods employed to enable students to learn about? And from?

• Continuing on this theme, do you ever invite Muslim speakers into school? How are they used?

• Do you have any Muslim pupils? Do you employ them as a kind of ‘resource’? Perhaps to encourage dialogue?

• Are there examples of interfaith dialogue?

• Are there educational visits to, for example, a Mosque?

• I wonder if you can say something about the potential for and specific ‘Islamic construction’ which could result from Muslim speakers, visits to Mosques, dialogue and so forth – and how do you deal with this? How can we decide what is a ‘right vision’ of Islam?
Something general about text books and other resources. Are the text books, audio visual resources and so forth that you use predominantly written or produced by Muslim or non-Muslim’s?

I wonder whether text books (for example) inform the curriculum or the other way around? In other words are text books written to satisfy the needs of the curriculum or vice versa? I wonder if you have any insights or perceptions on this?

The use of Religious Artefacts and Construction

I want to reflect upon the use of artefacts in the teaching of RE, their benefits and any pitfalls that you might perceive.

Do you use artefacts in teaching RE? In what ways do you find it useful?

How?

Do you perceive any particular problems with taking an artefact out of its religious context? Or is it possible that through the use of an artefact the ‘inner meaning of the artefact will disclose itself’? (Hull)

I wonder whether the use of artefacts might not lead to greater negativity and stereotyping, particularly at the hands of the non-adherent, and how we might guard against this?

Stereotyping and Construction

The Education Reform Bill (1988) stated that RE should ‘reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking into account the teachings of other principle religions represented in Great Britain’ (HMG, 1988, 6). There are those who would argue that this approach could advance Christian claims to supremacy and marginalise adherents of other religions. I wonder if you have any thoughts on how one could guard against this?

Linked to this is the whole area of religious ‘truth’ (Barnes argues that ‘to suggest that all religions are complementary and not in competition contradicts the self understanding of most religious adherents and the doctrinal claims of most religions’). I wonder of you have any thoughts on how one tackles issues of doctrine and claims of religious truth? Should we?

Do you have examples of negative stereotyping among pupils and how are these handled?
• Are there any particular problems relating to media construction of Islam and Muslims?

• How are difficult issues handled? (For example Jihad, the media construction of Muslims as terrorists etc.). Is there a tendency to shy away from difficult issues?

• Linked to this is the whole question of how one deals with the issues surrounding the controversial role of religion in contemporary society (Ofsted suggested that this is not given sufficient attention in most agreed syllabuses and examination courses). How do we? Should we?

• What room is given for issues of diversity? Do we present Islam as something that is homogenous and static, or something that is dynamic and fluid – and how? Is deference paid to the dominant tradition?

Language, Religious Literacy and Construction

• What methods do you employ to define religious terminology? I am thinking particularly about things like ‘word banks’, the SEC glossary of terms.

• Do you perceive any particular strengths and weaknesses with these approaches?

• I wonder how we can help pupils move from a passive understanding of a word (dictionary definition) to a more active understanding? Do you have any insights into this?

• Do you ever use primary texts, Qur’an and Hadith? How do you employ them? Are there any particular difficulties that you perceive?
APPENDIX 2

Example of headed data sheets

Example 1

Construction

Syllabus Issues

3:1

Has a ‘loose interpretation’ of the LAS. All schemes of work derive from a school previously taught at where ‘it worked really nicely’ felt that the LAS was so vague that anything ‘would fit in’ – ‘I think you could construct most things.’

Stated that ‘I take full responsibility for the curriculum that is in place as Head of RE’

Felt that the previous syllabus had placed ‘a lot of emphasis on work sheets and text books … this is Islam according to whatever book we happen to be using.’ Now they used more ‘peer assessment and understanding’ rather than just ‘knowledge’. A good example of this that she gave was the Church/Mosque project.

The HOD is not just responsible for the Syllabus but also for all schemes of work and lesson plans, which are detailed down to the finest point: ‘I do it all’. This is partly because of the non specialist input (RE as part of humanities): ‘there is nothing worse than teaching out of your comfort zone … ‘the idea behind it is that it would be a good lesson – and when I use good I am talking about Ofsted criteria.’ Asked whether this meant that in some way Ofsted was therefore involved in the construction she was adamant that they were ‘not in the slightest’ – just the outcomes not the content. Teacher acknowledged that the lessons might be too structured. Whilst they ensured a good lesson, and could be used by teachers covering sickness and absence as well as non-specialist, there is a danger that you ‘actually stop looking at your class and their needs.’

What is taught?

Christianity in each year group (except 11) At Key stage 3 also Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism (so 4)

GCSE: Short course Xianity – to make sure that gets in. Then Philosophy and Ethics.
In response to the popularity of the Edexcel syllabus he argued that ‘it has all the elements of citizenship in it so you can tick two boxes at once’ this he felt was a strength of the syllabus. He also argued that ‘I quite like it, it’s interesting, it attaches to religion things students probably haven’t thought of as having a religious relevance.’

Schemes of Work etc

Who produces them? ‘we all do over time … it’s an organic evolving.’

Syllabus issues

This school has integrated humanities at Key Stage 3. Uses Locally Agreed Syllabus, but this is very vague and just lists things that they need to know.

Islam done in year 9

At Key stage 3 ‘We do Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Rastafarianism in year 7 it was Sikhism and in year 9 Islam … at Key Stage 3 it is certainly not in depth … key facts, beliefs, founder, country of origin, population … activities around them which help develop key skills.’

Key Stage 4. It is at this key stage that they focus more on Muslim attitudes.

Strengths Weaknesses

LAS

6:12 ‘it is certainly a strength that it’s such a wide variety of … opportunities to be learning about different faiths and different aspects of different faiths but again the weakness of that is getting a rough idea of a whole lot without going into much depth with anything’

This teacher had been absent for an extended period and when he returned decided, instead of going on to a new topic, to go back over material they had previously done in his absence, but in much more depth – ‘instead of paying lip service to other religions’: ‘the kids were more receptive to it’

‘Not enough time to really explore certain things’

Edexcell

His main comment was not about the exam per se but he felt that the choice of Islam and Christianity was not ‘hugely engaging’
‘the amount of content that they need to know for the exam, and then the amount of time that we have to deliver that, it really limits the amount of scope that you have for consolidating learning and making learning more engaging and fun.’ ‘instead of doing group work or role plays … good learning strategies … I often find myself under pressure to deliver a certain amount of content that they have to know.’

(Content in new syllabus reduced and more about evaluation)

Time 3 x 100 minute lessons per fortnight reduced to 2

Did not particularly like Victor Wotton, and often didn’t use it.

‘too mind numbing’

Would choose Islam because of the current climate ‘but a lot of kids complain about it because they do it for two years … and they get really bored with it … and resentful. Not so much with the Christianity, but with the Islam.’

‘Victor Wotton focuses quite a lot on the similarities, so what’s the point’ [this is how students feel] it is not an enriching experience.

Non –specialist teachers is an issue. The pupils removed were in a GCSE class taught by a history teacher.

Will would like to know who is in his class – did he have refugees who had maybe come from difficult circumstances, so that when he came to teach ‘difficult subject’ he would be prepared and know how to approach them. Like terrorism or war, for example.

5:1

Syllabus

Adapted by the school from LAS (West Sussex) but very loosely (note Church School). From this HOD would produce SOW. Also note at KS4 it is just Christianity that is taught.

Quite freely adapted? ‘completely, to be honest … there is so little in the actual Agreed Syllabus for Key Stage 3 basically we plan our schemes of work and then fit it to the Agreed Syllabus, because it doesn’t give you anything … we do what we want and then fit it and make sure that we have covered everything.’

Is that a weakness of the Agreed Syllabus (i.e. because it doesn’t give you anything)? ‘Oh completely, it’s awful … it’s horrendous … there is just nothing in it, it’s so brief … Key stage there is basically one side of A4’

But ‘I like the fact that we are able to do what we want to do’
5:2

Syllabus issues

In the middle of re-writing but its KS4 not 3 and I have commented on this elsewhere.

‘I thought we might go for Islam – but we didn’t’

Strengths Weaknesses

‘Not really, I don’t look at the syllabus that much … all mine comes from above’

S of W done together with HOD

3:2 and 3:3

Syllabus issues

Done here as part of humanities up until year 9 and then in year 9 it is RS and ‘life skills’ and then in year 10 it’s the short course GCSE – but no Islam.

So in lower school – most of this is AJ interview

Islam done in Year 9

Strengths and Weaknesses

‘If non-specialists are teaching it RS doesn’t always have the same academic recognition as maybe history … and it’s not taught as well as it might be if there was a specialist’ argued that in fact this negativity is sometimes brought into the classroom by non-specialist teachers. For this reason specific lesson plans are provided by HOD for RE (but not for history and geography where there is a medium term plan in place)

4:2

Locally Agreed in the lower school (see elsewhere) Islam not taught in Key Stage 4

AQA Exam at GCSE (but no Islam)

Strengths and Weaknesses to Agreed Syllabus?

Very vague when asked this and had to be pushed

‘Because we only have an hour a week we never get to cover as much as we would like to’
Example 2

Pedagogy

3:1

A little bit vague about this. When asked whether her pedagogy was phenomenological, thematic, or whatever she said ‘we mix and match’ – then claimed her methodology was ‘systematic – I think’. ‘It’s very much: “this is a religion we are studying”’. She was aware of the recent research of Kay. She also said ‘I hope I am not phenomenological!’ she was clear that she was not ‘experiential’ – partly out of a concern over what parents might think. She wanted pupils to understand the faith of another, but ‘I wouldn’t want it to be a walk in the shoes. I want the students to be critical, I don’t want it to be a presentation of a faith as a given.’

About A1 and A2

In response to question about A2 – ‘We’ve tried to bring in some assessments for that’ largely critical reflections tasks – but ‘some staff have been quite anti towards it, they have not embraced it.’ It has been ‘very frustrating’ and has caused ‘some grief’

1:2

When asked whether the teaching style (for the Edexcel) was thematic he argued that it was ‘without a doubt’ – because of the way the syllabus was set up.

About A1 and A2

Argued that A2 was ‘very difficult to achieve’ arguing that this was a particular problem now that they have less time. He also went on to argue that ‘… there is really only one thing you have to get over to them and that is the idea of a spiritual dimension to life, and if you can get that idea across to certain students then the learning from religion is a lot easier to do, but if after a couple of years of teaching they just don’t get it …’ then it is difficult. Also argued that it is difficult, even bizarre, talking to the students about the religious experiences that people have had throughout history and they are ‘sitting in a classroom with their mates, with all the other distractions, to make them think that there is something else out there.’ This is ‘tricky’. After all ‘monks spend their lives sat in isolation meditating on something and achieve that spiritual realization, we are being graded on our ability to give it to kids in an hour or two hour slot!’

Spiritual/Experiential
Does this fall by the wayside? ‘Absolutely! You can’t do that … you *could* do that at Key Stage 3 … [but] I don’t know if that would help at GCSE level’ there is ‘a gap between the two’

1:3

**Pedagogy**

‘It lends itself to doing nice activities’ particularly at Key Stage 3

**Muslim pupils as a resource**

‘I try to’ has often clarified with pupils on key words, pronunciation – sometimes challenge what text books say or what teacher says – sees this as positive. ‘I would never say that were actually wrong, but then there is another issue in that their particular Imam might have that opinion’ – and so recognised the possibility of Islamic construction. On the whole he found pupils at Key Stage 3 were happy to help – more reticent at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 ‘they quite like the attention.’

**Number of religions? Confusion?**

‘definitely, definitely’ particularly between Hinduism and Buddhism. ‘but it’s nothing major really’ ‘we don’t go into that amount of depth … where it could cause confusion’ (KS3)

**About A1 and A2**

My view (CRL) not enough evaluation in the exam – although as WP says they are seeking to address this and have more AT2. Will actually felt that the AT2 is more important ‘all the tasks … and the assessments that I write [at KS3] I try to make it more evaluative … and projecting things back on their own lives.’

5:1

**Confusion**

All six world religions are studied in the lower school

‘The most obvious, most common confusions are things like knowing the key words for places of worship, or holy books … they get confused in those areas, but because we have only got the two years groups really, because Year 7 is new and different, we’ve only got the Years 8 and 9 … we don’t get much chance to go back to the religions, we don’t really get to see whether there’s much confusion.’ They seem to understand it while they are actually studying. Assessed by end of module assessments, but not later – and once at KS4 it is just Christianity that is studied. However, soon it will be Christianity and Judaism.
Any reason why Judaism and not Islam? ‘I guess we were put off with teaching Islam with some of the problems we’ve had with parents complaining … over the past few years … so it didn’t seem logical to choose something which might stir up more problems … plus I don’t feel that my level of understanding Islam …’

Islam was taught in Year 9 for about 7 weeks

**Thematic Approach?**

‘Yes …’

Experiential? ‘We don’t particularly use much experiential stuff … not against it if it seems appropriate we would do something, but we stick more with the more traditional video, discussion, tasks’

**AT1 and AT2**

How? Strategies ‘The most obvious one is every lesson we start off with a ‘starter question’ or something like that and more often than not that will fit into the ‘learning from’ religion and then you build on that throughout the lesson … it’s there usually right from the beginning, whether they realise it or not.’ And also through the tasks throughout the lesson.

**5:2**

**Thematic**

‘We look at them all separately’ a different religion each half term

**Confusion? They do 6**

‘Yes, the lower sets definitely do, they get really confused with Buddhism and Hinduism’ and also Sikhism ‘even in the upper school’ where they only do Christianity, they get mixed up with the beliefs of other religions.

With Islam? Sometimes they confuse the role of Muhammad ‘he gets confused with Jesus quite a bit, and also a common mistake that they think he’s a God, Muhammad … but other than that, not really.’ Not as much as they do with other religions.

**Pedagogy**

Ofsted report had highlighted that they wanted to see more ‘active learning styles’ and ‘diversity in the classroom, so she felt that they were changing. RE used to be ‘sit in silence and copy from a text book’ … more now question and answer and discussion
based ‘now I think we are trying to incorporate more variety … and more experiential learning … but it’s being done now’ But still uses text books.

**AT 1 and AT2**

**How?**

‘it is quite hard’ (look In folder at S of W etc) ‘but I think mainly you do it from life experiences … what have you learnt from this, and this is how their life would be … that is how you make it accessible to them.’ ‘to show the impact on how it would be if you were a Muslim …living in this society’

**Themes and confusion**

Confusing things like Islamic Festivals with Hindu Festivals ‘I think they get mixed up in the key beliefs, definitely, I think sometimes they do … life after death, and how a religion starter’ are particular parts they get confused over. But by and large the rest they are OK with. Come with fairly limited subject knowledge from feeder schools.

**3:2 and 3:3**

**Confusion**

Teach four world religions at Key Stage 3 (no Judaism or Sikhism)

Islam is taught in year 7 (so quite young)

Confusion ‘not really ... because it's not taught by themes ... although sometimes they have referred to Gandhi as Christian because he is taught alongside Martin Luther King.’ Argued that there was no confusion because each religion is taught separately as single units!

**Pedagogy**

Very unclear thought probably mixed method but ‘it ends up feeling you have a certain amount to teach and you just kind of stick to the syllabus and go through the lesson plans you’ve been told and you don’t really reflect on how you are putting that across.’ So not really explicit what methods are being used. Agreed that the construction is that which has already been given by the lesson plans and the syllabus.

Particularly thought that as a relatively inexperienced teacher (2 years) you tend to stick more to the lesson plans – particularly given exam expectations and suchlike.

**A1 and A2**

Claimed they are combined in the LAS (although you can tell which is which)
‘I think that will often happen without it being explicit ... i don’t think you can really assess it [A2] I don’t think you can have a written assessment’ particularly through discussion etc. Based upon A1.

3:3 felt that you were in fact doing this when you are learning about concepts like, for example, sanctity of life. You learn from what a religion has to say and you can apply it to your own life. ‘It wouldn’t seem fair to assess it.’

4:1

Confusion?

Asked whether studying so many religions led to confusion he was very emphatic ‘yes, absolutely … ‘Year 10’s sat the first half of their GCSE last week and they haven’t done any Islam since year 8 … and they are still getting Hinduism and Islam mixed up’

‘I don’t know the reason for the confusion’ because they do not study it as part of the exam (only in year 8) but wondered whether it was partly due to the prevalence of stories about Islam in the media and culture and they ‘just get their wires crossed’

[Exam is Christianity and Hinduism – there choice very similar to EDEXCELL]

Tends to be a thematic approach? ‘at Key Stage 4 certainly, and we kind of mix it up at Key Stage 3 … we will look at a religion maybe for one unit, and the unit after may be about suffering and so then we will kind of reference a couple of religions in relation to that, we might look at symbolism and how different religions might use symbols, and the unit after that might be ‘world religions’ and the class might be divided up so that different groups will look at different religions.’

Experiential?

Would love to but ‘Time is an issue, because we only teach RS one hour a week.’ – we do it ‘as much as we will do basic stilling exercises in relation to meditation’

Does use an empathetic approach

‘To put yourself in someone else’s shoes … is a vital part of RS’

‘If you can develop that skill it is really important in whatever walk of life you go into.’ Key Stage 4 is particularly about this – but also in year 8 teaching about Islam – what would it be like going through Ramadan for example.

AT2: And this is how the school attempts to fulfil AT2. When asked ‘are they able to do it?’ in other words can they be empathetic: ‘Depends what it is … it is interesting, some of the … higher level pupils struggle with it a little bit … some can and some can’t and
academic ability doesn’t really reflect whether someone can feel empathy or not.’ In fact for some of the lower ability pupils it can be ‘the way in for them’

4:2

Confusion?

‘Yes’ very emphatic about this!

‘Kids tend to think that all brown people are Muslim [note she is a ‘brown’ Hindu] so even if we haven’t been looking at Islam in year 9 or year 10 and we have a practice test … they would always refer to the Hindu text as the Qur’an … they get Hinduism and Islam mixed up all the time … but they tend to lump Eastern religions as one … some of them get confused with Buddhism because there is no leader … no head like the Pope, they definitely get confused with different types of Christianity, really confused … but they do get confused with Islam and Hinduism.’

Pedagogy

S of W by all – then lesson plans by each

Claimed that in KS 3 not thematic (very emphatic) ‘year 7 it’s becoming more experiential because we have had to change schemes of work … because of the new syllabus that is coming in … [The island – a project not religion specific but looking at things like rules, customs etc as a way in to religion] … year 8 is more teacher led [this is where they do Islam – this is also where the hajj games comes in, so not totally teacher led, a long time spent on hajj].

And then KS4 very thematic (but no Islam here).

However: ‘One term we will look at Islam, the next term we will look at Buddhism, the next … so it’s not thematic it’s subject based.’
APPENDIX 3

Observation schedule

School:

Key stage/year group:

Lesson topic:

Who can be found in the setting, and how many people are present? What are their characteristics and roles?

What is happening in the setting?

What teaching methods are employed?
Are pupils engaged in the learning process?

How is Islam defined? Is it treated as one religion among many?

Is this a Western/Christian construction of Islam, viewed from the perspective of ‘the other’.

Who or what is responsible for the ‘construction’ of Islam? Is it the teacher, text books or other resources, pupils? Are text books written by Muslims or non-Muslims?

Evidence of construction through dialogue?
Is Islam constructed as a homogenous religion or something which is diverse, vibrant and fluid?

Is the construction of Islam consensual, free from contradiction and conflict? Is this ‘curriculum Islam’ superficial and oversimplified?

How are issues of truth handled?

Is there any evidence of stereotyping, either from pupils or teacher? How is it dealt with?
Clarification and correction: What is going on here? Is it a PR job for Muslims or the other way around? Is negative disposition allowed?

Does the lesson concentrate on the externals of religion? What about sense of awe, wonder, empathy?

Learning from or learning about?

Are artefacts used? If so, how?

Issues of language, religious literacy and literature: How is language employed? Are word banks or such like used. Use of Qur’an and Hadith?
APPENDIX 4

Example of a Content Analysis Proforma

Analysis of Coding

**Title:** *Religions and Beliefs* by Musharraf Hussain and Anne Jordon (Nelson Thornes, 2006)

**Type:** Book

**School:** 5

**General Comments:**

The only book in the sample which has been written (or at least co-written) by a Muslim – MH is a Sunni Imam from Nottinghamshire. It is part of the Religions and Beliefs series written to match the non-statutory National Framework and for KS3. On the whole it is thematic. We have 3 Units:

1. Looking for meaning
2. Who is responsible
3. We’re not on our own

After each unit there is an assessment task. The ‘skills’ that are being tested (level 1-6) fit in with the NSF skills and understanding and begin with very simple K questions and level 1 – to become gradually more reflective and U questions at level 6.

Under each unit there are the following themes:

**Unit 1**
Beliefs and concepts: beliefs about God, the 5 pillars.
Expressions of spirituality: Salah, life after death, Hajj
Authority: The Qur’an, Sunnah
Science and Religion: Believing the truth, Islam and science.

**Unit 2**
Ethics and relationships: Lifestyle choices and effects, knowing what is right and wrong, family life.
Rights and responsibilities: Sawm, Mosques and the community, Muslim Youth helpline, social responsibilities, British Muslims?

**Unit 3**
Global issues: poverty – Rich and poor, Zakah, Muslim hands united for the needy
Global issues: the environment – Stewards of the earth, putting it in to practice, the IFEES/
Global issues: conflict – Jihad – struggle against injustice; Moving from conflict to peace; terrorism.

It all ends with a glossary

Each page starts with an objective in the LH margin. This states clearly what students should be learning.
Very much about political correctness – a PR job for Islam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Label</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction Of Islam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The construction seems to be guided by a number of factors: 1. The political agenda (so PR Islam – those who do not conform are simply not Muslims) 2. The non stat framework. 3. The Sunni agenda (and perhaps Muslim agenda which seeks to pretend that there is no diversity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI-WV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The fact that this was written by a Muslim might be responsible for the potential distortions that occur and which are based upon tradition rather than fact. For example his treatment of the Qur’an: ‘The first authenticated copy of the Qur’an was available within two years of M’s death. Copies of this original version were made and sent to the major cities of the Islamic world. Two of these copies still exist.’ (17) this is a very traditional view and is not the view that most scholars would acknowledge. Uthman asked for a complete copy to be transmitted to writing around 20 years after M’s death. There is the issue of variant readings, and also the probably dating of early MSS – which are much later (early 8th century).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI-DIS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who decides on the themes? One might think that they might be the same for other religions in this series – bearing in mind they are written for the non-stat framework? p. 6: in section on God: ‘Different people will have different answers to the question: “Who created the universe?” A Christian may say ‘God’, a Hindu may say, ‘Krishna’, an atheist may say … and a Muslim will say …’ (not sure the Hindu bit is correct? See also objective on page 20 mentioned below and the types of question. An example of this is: ‘The Qur’an teaches that the awesome beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI-ORAM</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
of the natural world is proof of God’s existence. How might a non-religious person explain why humans find the natural world so beautiful and impressive.’ So comparing Islam with other beliefs. Also on this page in a section on arguments for the existence of God – arguing that ‘Some religions have a long tradition of arguments to prove that God exists, and what God is like. Islam does not go into such in-depth discussion because Muslims believe God is beyond any human understanding or classification.’

Section on prophets M compared to Jesus. Jesus spoke the truth but it was corrupted by other – M’s words and actions were recorded faithfully. Then we have a question: ‘From what you know about Islam and Christianity, what do you think Muslims would agree on about Jesus? What would they disagree about?’ (p.21) of course very legitimate to compare J, I and C.

\[\text{CI-FC 1.5} \]
Written, in part, by a Muslim. Also boxes with Muslim voices throughout the book. Of course, these ‘voices’ always give a positive spin. Ex. It is important to put God first rather than fame or fortune (7).

\[\text{Homogeneity HOM-DIV 2.1} \]
At the very beginning in its ‘fast facts about Islam’ the 2 major groups are mentioned – but also wants to show that they share key beliefs. In its insistence that the division occurred in the early years of Islam (which is technically correct) it seeks to limit the idea of diversity, suggesting that Islam is consensual – in other words we have no mention of the differences between the 2 groups. Also no mention of other expressions of Islam – e.g. Sufism. In short what is really presented is consensual Islam based upon the Sunni tradition (from which the writer comes). Shi’a are only mentioned on the first page and never again – one would be left feeling that all Muslims believed and practiced that which is
See above. Apart from page 1 – where the two main groups are mentioned we have a largely Sunni construction. So the 5 pillars are described in ways that the Sunni (in particular) would regard them, not the way Shi’a might. Salah: again consensual, not mention of Shi’a attitude. Same with the Sunnah/Hadith.

This is very much about consensual Islam – all Muslims believe the same – and are whiter than white, and if you are not then the simple answer seems to be that you are not a Muslim. Seems like a political agenda – but will it work?

Yes – see above

No – not at all

Who decides on the themes? They seem politically motivated which makes me wonder about the whole book – is it pure PR?

Lots of questions to encourage empathy. So there might be a question which will ask: ‘Describe in your own words three things Muslims believe about God’ and then ‘What do you put first in your life? Explain why you have made this choice.’ Again – what would it be like at school if everybody acted like they were brothers or sisters (9)? What do you think are the most important things about being human?’ How would you feel about having to pray 5 times a day? (11)

Some really good photographs. Occasionally this comes over in the ‘objectives’ for example on p. 20. The objective is: ‘to be able to describe Muslim views on truth and religion and explain your own views on what is true and what you trust.’

Again: the objective on page 22: ‘to be able to explain the Islamic view of science and give your
own views on what science can and can’t explain.’ (all this sort of thing is to fit in to the NS framework).
Again – in section of Sawm they imagine they are on a sponsored fast for a day!

| PED-KU | 3.5 | Interestingly, this book avoids treating tradition as fact: More often than not we have a prelude like: ‘Muslim believe.’
Really good photos.
Good explanations – for example Hajj is very good, particularly section on symbols |
| PED-SUP | 3.6 | By and large fairly simplistic and superficial – not much detail, and no debate. |

**Language**

| LA-WS | 4.1 | We have a glossary on the left hand margin with the words that appears on that page. They are spelt but not defined (definition comes in the text itself). In terms of spelling we have the preferred: Makkah, Qur’an etc. |

| LA-WD | 4.2 | Islam defined in a different way in this text book (maybe influence of Muslim writer) generally text books trace the beginning of Islam to M – but this begins with the creation of humankind – M seen as the last in a line of prophets to ‘renew’ God’s message.
The word is defined as ‘surrendering to the will of God’ (5) no mention of ‘peace’
Takes the concept of the Ka’bah right back to Adam and not just Ibrahim (which many seem to do). – but again it is ‘Muslims believe …’ not stated as fact like we so often have had. |

| LA-WB | 4.3 | See above |

| LA-DEF | 4.4 | Most of the words in the word bank are not controversial. However, the glossary does define Jihad as: ‘The constant struggle against any evil and injustice; and effort to do good.’ (63) |

| LA-WU | 4.5 | |

| LA-PS | 4.6 | Passages from PS throughout to back up what is being said. Sometimes PS used to present ‘the truth’ as a Muslim might see it – see p 21. |

**Stereotyping**
| ST-NS  | 5.1 | Has passages which seek to correct negative stereotypes – note Email on page 13: ‘I am writing to point out 2 serious mistakes that your websites says about Muslim beliefs …’ – students asked to finish it off.

Good section on lifestyle choices – problem page giving difficulties that young Muslims might face growing up in UK (26-27) – 5 prayer times, cosmetic surgery/vanity, online chatting with boys, shouting rude words at a girl (is this positive PR?) smoking and drinking, covering up (again this is positive PR – read what it says on 27).

Talks about British Muslims still facing a lot of prejudice: ‘Terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and in London in 2005 have fuelled this – along with a lot of ignorance about Islam.’ (35) is this a bit disingenuous. After all – these terrorists were Muslim. Denying the truth does not stop prejudice it fuels it. There are some good questions here, however, that pupils are asked to consider (part of the community cohesion debate no doubt) ‘Prejudice is usually based upon ignorance and stupidity. What could local mosques do to educate the wider community about Islam and their community?’ (35)

Look at page 41: perhaps more should be said about these sentiments ***** perhaps this is part of the problem, but it is not really enough just to quote them. |
| ST-WV  | 5.2 |
| ST-OC  | 5.3 |
| ST-PR  | 5.4 | What we do not have is the life of M section that we have so often encountered – with the image of the good M against the evil Makkans. But at the same time in ignoring the history, neither do we have the battles or the military expansion.

I think the whole book is a PR exercise. All the positives are expressed: fraternal love (9) the |
worldwide community (Ummah) (9). The common humanity if all (9). This is all fine, of course, but one needs to tackle the realities of conflict which call this into question. Again: Human beings can choose to believe in God or not. If they believe in God their purpose in life is to do good (which presumably means the opposite for those who do not!)

Very keen to stress the positive teachings of the Qur’an (see page 17) likewise with the Hadith – all of the examples are about helping people – and this is carried over in the questions (page 19)

Section on science is debatable. Does the usual thing of flagging up the fact that to the Muslim science and religion are not 2 different things but that there is not conflict. And so lists the many achievements of Islam in this field (22) and the timeline at the bottom. Islam agrees with the big bang (is this true of all Muslims?) and so far as evolution is concerned ‘Muslims would not entirely agree’ – I think they do not agree at all! Often I think ‘some Muslims, most Muslims idea – because what is actually happening is he is defining what it is to be Muslim – it is his construction and other Muslims might disagree – see for example terrorism section.

Unit 2: Who is responsible: Begins by saying that Muslims believe that God has shown them the way to live – and stresses things like being kind, generous, considerate and respectful, patient modest and not getting angry! Looking after anyone who comes for help – and going out seeking to help others. Again – all very commendable, but will students believe this when they see what is going on around them. Should reality be ignored?

Again – section on knowing what is right and wrong gives very laudable things that Muslims ‘believe’ : truthfulness, justice, honesty, forgiveness, humility, patience, kindness, generosity – in opposition to Anger, lying,
jealousy, selfishness, boasting, arrogance, hatred, vanity. Very interesting in this section (on kindness) we have the story of M and his conquering army and the dog with puppies (no mention of what the army was doing)
It’s always the sunny side – so with families we have respect for parents, love of children, role of women ‘what they say in the home goes!’ role of women as teachers, father as provider.
Marriage stressed – arranged not forced (but is this true) – surely it is better to be honest and then say ‘but the hadith forbids this …’

Good section on Muslim Youth helpline – though is this again about positive PR? And part of the agenda (37)

Section on social responsibility: ‘Islam teaches that human beings are all Allah’s family.’ We are all brothers and sisters to one another and we are all equal. Muslims believe God wishes people to be good to each other, to respect one another and to look after each other.’ – the section on ‘what makes a good citizen?’ a Muslim police officer etc – but what about Wooton Bassett? Was this written by a politician?

British Muslims: ‘As well as obeying the law, Islam urges Muslims to treat other people well … Muslims should be:
• Kind
• Helpful
• Fair to all
• Peaceful and respectful. (but see above ***)

Great deal in Unit 3 on poverty and the Islamic teaching on caring for the poor. – using Q and H as examples. Zakah explained in some detail (although is it for the poor or more than that – kind of suggests that it is but not in detail – also is it not just for Muslims)
Also good section on Muslim Hands – have no
problem with this kind of positive thing being stressed – but needs to be more balanced. Also stewards of the earth (50-51), animal rights (52-53), the IFEES but again where do these themes come from.

Jihad – a very particular understanding of it. Talks about M in Makkah and his eventual actions as purely defensive (nothing about the Jews, nothing about military expansion). Jihad defined as ‘to struggle against evil to fulfil God’s wishes.’ – again, gives the very standard justifications for a just war (p. 57) but is this always the case? Then we have this question: ‘Many newspapers in Britain use the word Jihad to mean literally ‘holy war’. This is not what Jihad really means. Write a short article for a national tabloid newspaper explaining in simple terms what the real meaning of Jihad is in Islam. you could use the headline: ‘Why the world needs Greater Jihad’. (57) Political correctness gone mad! (see how DW defines it) Much more, rightly, about greater Jihad. Working for Peace (58-59)

Terrorism and Islam

At least it covers the topic. But its answer is 9/11 and other acts of terrorism is that these people were not Muslims because their actions are anti-Islamic. Is this good enough? Links it to terrorism is NI saying that no one blamed Catholics or Protestants (I am not sure that this is really true) One must consider that these individuals believed themselves to be Muslim and their actions to be Islamic. They were Islamised in Mosques and Maddrashes. Surely better to acknowledge this, and at the same time attack this at anti-Islamic. The answer is not to bury ones head in the sand! What is does do well is highlight the Qur’anic teaching etc. – but this is the same Qur’an as they were using!
APPENDIX 5

Materials subjected to content analysis

Text Books


Audio Visual

*Belief File* BBC (used in three schools)

*Life of Muhammad* (part of *Quest Animated World Faiths*) Channel 4; S4C. (Used in three schools)

Syllabuses

Three Locally Agreed Syllabuses

Edexcel GCSE Syllabus

In House

Exam Revision Booklet (school 2)

Syllabuses, Schemes of Work and Lesson Plans.

Policy document (School 2)
APPENDIX 6

Characteristics of sample schools

So as to ensure anonymity schools and teachers are identified by number throughout the thesis. The following descriptions of the schools and the areas in which they are found are taken from the most recent Census of 2001 and other official documents, but are only given in very general terms in order to preserve anonymity whilst at the same time presenting an accurate portrayal.

School 1

(a) School 1 is located in a large urban city. The population of the city is culturally diverse and is often regarded as ‘cosmopolitan’. Although the city has a lower proportion of non-white residents than the national average, it has a higher proportion than the South East as a whole. The number of Muslims living in the city is small, but higher than the national average of 3.1% (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001).

(b) School 1 is a large coeducational comprehensive school. It is non-denominational and caters for pupils aged 11-16.

(c) The school is located in an affluent area of the city. The largest population in the school could be described as white middle class (one teacher referred to the average pupil as belonging to a Guardian reader family). The Muslim population of the school is small (less than 1%).

(d) Religious Studies is taught as part of a wider humanities brief at Key Stage 3. In years 7 and 8 students have two Religious Studies lessons each fortnight, as well as two lessons of Geography and two lessons of history. Each lesson is of one hour 40 minutes duration. Pupils remain with the same teacher for all of these subjects. In year nine Humanities is delivered on a modular basis with each of the three subjects delivering two six week modules. Modules are taught by specialist teachers. At Key Stage 4 the core humanities subject is Religious Studies and Citizenship. Other humanities subjects are optional.

(e) The Head of Religious Studies believed that the subject had a high profile within the school and had a large teaching staff. However, she was also concerned that the teaching time for Religious Studies had recently been cut.

(f) At Key Stage 3 the school adapted the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Studies. Little Islam is taught in year 7. In years 8 and 9 students study Judaism, Buddhism and Rastafarianism, rites and rituals in different religions, and wealth and poverty and peace and conflict from a Christian and Muslim perspective. These latter topics formed a preparation for the Edexcell syllabus which is followed in Key Stage 4 and which concentrates on Christianity and Islam.
School 2

(a) School 2 is located in a large coastal town. Like many British coastal towns it has suffered from its over-reliance on tourism. The decline of the traditional seaside holiday has led to years of neglect along with comparatively high levels of unemployment. The employment levels are some 10% below the national average. There are limited high skilled employment opportunities, and educational qualifications fall well below the national averages (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001). Many of the towns former hotels, considered unfit for modern use, are now utilized as refugee hostels. Many refugees are Muslim and of Kosovan origin. The housing stock is generally regarded as of low quality. The perception of the town as a dumping ground for asylum seekers has led to a degree of tension, which appears to be based on race rather than religion. The Black or Minority Ethnic population of the area constitutes only around 3% of the total, although it is thought that there are between 70 and 90 ethnic groups within the area. The number of Muslims living in the town at the last census in 2001 was below the national average at 0.7% of the population. (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001)

(b) School 2 is a large comprehensive school for girls on the outskirts of the town. It is a non-denominational and caters for pupils aged 11-16. Sixth form provision is provided in conjunction with another local school. It is in a different Local Education Authority than School 1.

(c) Although the largest population of the school reflects the dominant white British population of the wider community, the number of Muslim pupils is higher than the local average at around 2%. This is thought by the school to be due to the fact that Muslim parents prefer single sex schooling.

(d) At Key Stage 3 the school adapts the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Pupils explore Christianity through the life of Jesus, the teachings and practice of contemporary Christianity, and a project on a person of faith. Buddhism, Hinduism and some Islam is also studied. In Key Stage 4 all pupils follow the same Edexcel exam syllabus as in School 1. The ‘other’ religion through which the various themes are explored in Islam. However, the school has decided to remove Islam and replace it with Hinduism. The interesting reasons for this change, which are pertinent to the current study, will be discussed in some detail later.

School 3

(a) School 3 is located in an affluent area of Southern England. The vast majority of the population, 82% live in their own homes. Over 98% of the population is ethnically white, with 0.2% Black, 0.4% Asian and 0.5% ‘other’. Recent census figured indicate that almost 77% describe themselves as Christian. Around 24% are over 60 years of age (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001).
The school is a large coeducational comprehensive with pupils aged 11-18. The sixth form are located at a site separate from the main school. The ethnic makeup of the school reflects the wider community with the majority of pupils being white British. The number of students from other ethnic backgrounds is negligible. There are very few Muslim pupils in the school (less than 1%). However, the Head of Department believed that there had been a gradual increase in recent years. Furthermore, she had observed that in the past two years there had been a growing tendency for Muslim students to express their faith more openly. This was particularly noticeable through the dress of Muslim girls.

Religious Education at the school is largely based upon schemes of work which the Head of Department had brought with her from a previous school in another part of the country. She described the school as having a ‘loose interpretation’ of the Agreed Syllabus, although their schemes of work broadly complied with it. This school followed the same Agreed Syllabus as School 1. Islam only features in Key Stage 3, and then only in years 7 and 8, where it was taught as part of a broader humanities program. This meant that many of the teachers were not Religious Education specialists. Some had been openly hostile to the teaching of Religious Education, although by and large the subject was well respected by teachers.

**School 4**

(a) The demography of the area in which School 4 is located is similar to School 3. The school is located in an affluent rural area of Southern England. The most recent statistical evidence from the 2001 Census indicated that the largest ethnic grouping is white British. The largest minority ethnic group is Chinese (0.3%). Only 0.4% of the population in the region declared themselves as Muslim, with 77% describing themselves as Christian. This is reflected in the population of the school.

(b) School 4 if he’s had a large coeducational school catering for students from 11-16. There is also a separate unit for post 16 education.

(c) At Key Stage 3 the Religious Studies Syllabus is based upon the Locally Agreed Syllabus and is also guided by the QCA skills. Islam is taught over two terms in year 8. Pupils study through 4 themes: What is Islam? The Life of the Prophet; The Qur’an; Four Pillars. There is then an extended project when pupils look in detail at the fifth pillar, Hajj. Islam is not taught in Key Stage 4 where the focus is on Christianity and Hinduism.

**School 5**

(a) School 5 is located on the outskirts of an affluent seaside town on the South
Coast of the United Kingdom. The area is a popular retirement location and this is reflected in population statistics which show a large number of residents aged 65 and above. By and large it has not suffered the economic fate of many British seaside towns, and which is a feature of the location in which School 2 is found.

(b) The most recent Census of 2001 indicated that the ethnicity of the town in which this school is found is overwhelmingly White British. Around 97% of the local population is white and 94% of the local population were born in the United Kingdom. The largest ethnic minority is Indian, which accounts for 0.4% of the population. 72% of the town describe themselves as Christian, with 0.8% declaring themselves as Muslim, against a national average of 3%. This is the largest single religious faith other than Christian. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the number of Muslims in the area has increased in recent years with the arrival of refugees into the community, most notably from Afghanistan, though statistical data would not confirm this until the next census in 2011.

(c) The school is a small Church of England school for boys aged 11-16. As a Church school the majority of pupils were from Christian backgrounds... There is a small number of Muslim boys, although the total number was well below 1%. A former Head Boy had been a Muslim pupil, which the Head of Religious Education thought was ‘really great.’

(d) At Key Stage 3 the school uses a syllabus which is very loosely based on the Locally Agreed Syllabus. In point of fact the Head of Department writes Schemes of Work and then seeks to fit them to the criteria if the Locally Agreed Syllabus (a syllabus which she describes as ‘awful’). She is happy that as a Church school there is a certain amount of freedom to adapt the Agreed Syllabus. At Key Stage 3 all six major world religions are studied. Islam is taught over seven weeks in year 9. The approach is fundamentally phenomenological. Islam is not taught at Key Stage 4 where the focus is on Christianity and Judaism.

School 6

(a) School 6 is located in a semi-rural area of Southern England close to a medium sized town. It is an affluent area on the commuter belt to London. The 2001 Census indicated that ethnicity of the population is almost entirely white (over 97%) with 93% born in the United Kingdom. 76% describe themselves as Christian. The Muslim population is 0.6%.

(b) School 6 is a coeducational Roman Catholic Secondary School for pupils aged 11-18. Not surprisingly the population of the school reflects its religious foundation, with the majority of pupils coming from a Roman Catholic background. In terms of ethnicity the school is reflective of its local catchment, being predominantly white middle class. There are very few students from ethnic minorities, with less than 1% being Muslim.

(c) At Key Stage 3 the school uses its own unique Religious Education syllabus
which has been developed by the Head of Department and which takes into account the Locally Agreed Syllabus and, more particularly, directives from the Roman Catholic Diocese. The syllabus and the resources that have been produced have proven popular and successful to the extent that they have been sold to other schools as part of a commercial enterprise. At Key Stage 3 pupils study four religions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. A phenomenological and thematic approach is applied.
APPENDIX 7

Participant information sheet

The Construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4

Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a research project which examines the way in which Islam is constructed for educational purposes at Key Stages 3 and 4. The research will be conducted by Colin Lawlor from the School of Education at the University of Brighton and will be supervised by Professor Roger Homan, Professor of Religious Education and Dr. Kate Williamson, Lecturer in Religious Education at the University of Brighton.

The research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Brighton Research Ethics Committee.

Your involvement in the research will involve being interviewed about your perceptions with regard to the teaching of Islam and any perceived problems which the teaching of Islam might involve. You will also be asked questions about the methods you employ when teaching Islam. The researcher would also like to observe lessons in which Islam is taught. Please be assured that the purpose of both is purely to ascertain how Islam is constructed and taught in secondary schools and not to make any judgement on quality of teaching. Finally, the researcher would wish to have access to any resources used in the teaching of Islam including text books, audio visual material, worksheets, syllabuses, schemes of work, and lesson plans. The anonymity of all participants and schools will be assured and will only be known to the researcher. The data collected will be for the purposes of academic research, the results of which might be published at some future date. Following completion members of the University of Brighton, its students and staff, will have access to the completed study. Schools and participants will only be identified by letter or number, thus ensuring confidentiality. Teachers will be offered transcripts of interviews upon request. Any data collected will be used only for the research purposes agreed, conforming with the Data Protection Act (1998). All tapes and transcriptions will be kept locked in a secure place and will only be accessible to the researcher. Any material of this nature will be kept for a period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to participate and you can withdraw at any time.

This information sheet is for you to keep. Thank you for your participation.
APPENDIX 8

Participant consent form

University of Brighton

The Construction of Islam at Key Stages 3 and 4

Participant Consent Form

- I agree to take part in this research which is to examine the construction of Islam in English Secondary Schools.
- I understand that this will involve an interview with the researcher, classroom observation and allowing the researcher access to teaching materials relating to the teaching of Islam (text books, audiovisual material, schemes of work, syllabuses, worksheets and lesson plans)
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet.
- I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- I understand that the findings of this research will be available to students and staff of the University of Brighton and that they might be published at a future date, but that anonymity will be preserved.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

Name (please print) …………………………………………………

Signed ……………………………………………………………

Date ………………………………………………………………
