



## Supporting and Valuing Tangential Thinking in English Education. Edward Collyer

In English education, there have been moves to counter the teach to the test approaches that arise out of a performative culture. For instance, Giovanelli and Mason (2015) advocate putting pupils' readings at the heart of learning, particularly when they encounter a text for the first time.

When I used such approaches to teach William Blake's 'The Tyger' as part of an English Literature A-Level, I found that it sparked some unexpected, but valuable discussion. One pupil was keen to point out how they interpreted Blake's poem both within the context in which it was written, as an allegory for the industrial revolution, but also within the context in which they received it. They claimed that the poem's references to industry resonated so much with them having grown up through a global climate emergency.

This presented me with a challenge. Whilst I had been happy to place pupils' interpretations at the heart of learning in single lessons, I had not considered what would happen beyond this. If we are to promote independent, pupil driven readings as a genuine approach in English studies, how could I not interfere with their interpretations, but act as a guide? I framed this class' next lesson around the pupil's comments about the climate change; my intention was to value the pupil's tangential comment and look for ways of supporting and extending this idea. The lesson was planned so that I could use my knowledge to guide the pupils through the lesson, without imposing any of my opinions about the text on to them.

We began by re-reading Blake's poem and comparing images of industrial towns in the late 18th century and the 21 century. The pupils were keen to point out that very little had changed in the last two hundred years, and that humans treated the environment with disdain. They latched on to images of chimneys, which made them think of references to furnaces in 'The Tyger.' The lesson culminated in the pupils using iPads to



re-imagine Blake's poem as a vlog. They played Blake, reciting his thoughts on the modern, industrialised world to the camera. Some groups chose to film their vlog in the car park, as they expressed their disgust at how cars had polluted the once beautiful landscape. Others filmed their vlogs inside. One pupil mimicked kicking a radiator off the wall in order to demonstrate Blake's disgust at the burning of fossil fuels. 'This,' one pupil said as he pointed towards the radiator 'is what will be our end.'

I was pleased that the learning activities had allowed the pupils to explore a tangent established by their own interpretations of a text in the previous lesson. However, some pupils expressed a fear that their interpretations in an exam scenario would not be credited by an examiner because their readings were not 'traditional.' Whilst this may have been a concern for them, the A-Level specifications tell us that pupils are able to both discuss the context in which a text was written and received. In other words, they can explore how the poem relates to their experience growing up in the modern day and should be credited for doing so.

### References

Giovanelli, M & Mason, J, "Well I don't feel that': Schemas, worlds and authentic reading in the classroom', *English in Education*, 49 (1), 41-55

## PGCE Research Review Article

### Religious Education ITE Covid-cohort survey.

Mark Plater

During my experience of recruiting and working with PGCE RE students for more than sixteen years, I have noticed two trends: firstly, there are fewer applicants for the available places, and secondly, more of them do not have a first degree in religion or a related subject. Attempts have been made to attract more and better qualified applicants at a national and local level, but we continue to fail to meet projected numbers.

The present Covid-19 cohort of RE ITE trainees seems to follow the same trends, but it is possibly 'unique', not only because of additional applicants as a result the

impact of Covid-related redundancies (Worth, 2020), but also because of subsequent media recognition of teachers as front-line workers (ibid.). It therefore offers a pertinent opportunity to ask: What does this particular cohort of students tell us about who will be our future RE teachers?

I have set myself quite a challenge: before the end of this course to get survey responses from 60% or more of all of the secondary RE ITE students presently in training in England- on University PGCE courses, undergrad BA/ QTS RE courses, in School Direct contexts, Teach First, SCITTs, and any other programmes on offer.

I am particularly interested to find out who is being attracted to the profession and why: what do they hope to gain from it, and what do they want to achieve by teaching the subject? In a time of ongoing under-recruitment this may help to address questions about who should be targeted in future recruitment campaigns, and maybe indicate potential 'missed out' groups.

My survey will offer items drawn from the FIT-Choice scale (Factors Influencing Teaching as a career choice) (Watt & Richardson, 2007), as well as asking questions about prior qualifications, personal spirituality, and some other factors like willingness to travel in order to secure a teaching post. Because of the growing emphasis on teaching a wide range of religions & worldviews in RE classes, a key recommendation of the recent RE Commission report (CoRE, 2018), it is pertinent to also ask, What range of personal worldviews and perspectives are represented by incoming RE teachers? How diverse are they in reflecting the range of religions and worldviews presently expressed in the UK? At present the online survey is being developed and piloted, and will then be made live from February to May 2021. In order to facilitate that I plan to contact all of the RE ITT providers across England, in order to entice students to complete the survey. To that end, a random

prize-draw is being offered for all those who participate, and for those willing to give an email address, to be followed up with further surveys in their NQT and RQT years of teaching. Such follow up surveys will explore issues of job securing and security, their NQT experience, CPD, etc., offering more longitudinal data on the experience of new RE teachers.

A Report on the findings of the survey will be produced during early summer 2021, and this will be made available to the RE community at large, and to any others who may have an interest in the results.

If you would like to know more about the study please contact Mark Plater: [mark.plater@bishopg.ac.uk](mailto:mark.plater@bishopg.ac.uk)

## References

Commission on RE (CoRE). (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*. RE Council.

Watt, H. M. G. & Richardson, P. W. (2007) Motivational Factors Influencing Teaching as a Career Choice: Development and Validation of the FIT-Choice Scale. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75:3 pp.167-202.

Worth, J. (2020). *Teacher Labour Market in England: Annual Report 2020*. NFER.

## Trunk Call Residency undertaken by artist Dr John Rimmer November 2020

From November 9<sup>th</sup> to November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Dr John Rimmer undertook an Artist Residency at the GP Studios in Lincoln, entitled Trunk Call. Due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions this had to take an online form; the residency had already been postponed once due to the first Covid-19 'lockdown' and John was keen that this time it should go ahead, albeit using a 'virtual' platform.

The residency brought together new and developing alongside work made previously. The focus was on the use of text and image and artworks shown bridged different media including paint, drawing and video and sound. Each explored aspects of communication - how it can be corrupted or break down organically in communication systems such as computing, texting, translations, misreading, ambiguities and the obtuse convolutions inherent in language. The focus was on playful responses to communication breakdown, allowing the development of ideas and the creation of new work.

John Rimmer gave a residency talk about his work on the evening of Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November, where he discussed select works of art from his career to put the new works in context. This was followed by an informal, lively discussion with General Practice members Andrew Bracey and Nick Simpson and with event guests about what was created during the residency and how it fitted with both John's earlier work and with current events and times.

Work can be viewed at: Location: <https://www.johnrimmer.co.uk/exhibitions/trunk-call> or through the GP Studios website at [www.general-practice.net/](http://www.general-practice.net/). For further information, please contact John at [John.Rimmer@bishopg.ac.uk](mailto:John.Rimmer@bishopg.ac.uk).



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