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## Review of Religion, Education, and Society by Arweck, E. and Jackson, R.

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**Elisabeth Arweck and Robert Jackson (eds.)*****Religion, Education, and Society****New York: Routledge, 2014 hb 171pp \$145.00**ISBN 978-0-415-82472-9*

*Religion, Education, and Society* collects current research findings focusing on young people and their relationship to religion in their education. This research presents insights on how Religious Education (RE) is taught in secondary schools in the United Kingdom. Chapters of particular interest were 5, 8, and 11.

In chapter 5, James C. Conroy, David Lundie, and Vivienne Baumfield provide background on religious education as an element of the search for meaning. Due to this shift in thinking, students are making their own meaning through RE, as opposed to attending to the truth claims of a religion. This chapter attempted to investigate how questions of meaning are treated daily in classrooms. Case studies presented offered insights into student perceptions of religious education and this meaning-making process. The authors found that with multiple paths to meaning, RE fails to create any kind of ethical meaning for students. Conroy, Lundie, and Baumfield conclude that the claims of religious community must first be affirmed before meaning can be constructed through shared experiences of culture, religion, and events.

In chapter 8, Judith Everington presents a research study focused on a cohort of English trainee teachers of religious education and the role their personal life knowledge played in their teaching and understanding of teacher-student relationships. The cohort of fourteen beginning teachers included a mix of Muslims, Christians, atheists, agnostics or undecided, and one Sikh. Through regular discussions and questionnaires, data were gathered to determine the extent to which personal life knowledge was used in the cohort's teaching. Although they used their personal knowledge in varying ways and for different purposes, all the teachers believed personal knowledge was valuable in the teaching of religious education. Everington also discusses some of the dangers and benefits of this openness. Her findings suggest a need for teacher trainees to have opportunities to reflect on the practice of sharing their personal life knowledge with students. Everington made a good case for sharing personal life knowledge in the teaching of RE.

The essay in chapter 9 focuses on the contribution of Swedish teachers to the integration of Swedish Muslims. Jenny Berglund focuses on the question, who do you talk to when you are concerned or worried about something? Respondents were allowed to choose five of fourteen options that included “parent,” “teacher,” and “priest,” to name a few. Among her findings Berglund discovered that compared to 5% of the rest of the respondents, 50% of those identifying themselves as Muslim indicated they confided in teachers for help. Berglund discussed possible reasons for this finding. These included Swedish teachers’ ability to establish and maintain relationships of trust with students. She also explored cultural aspects of Islam in relation to contemporary Swedish culture. The essay begins an interesting dialogue on the benefits of relationships between Muslim students and their teachers that can be continued by the reader. Berglund concludes with suggestions for further research on the relational dimensions of teaching as well as Muslim-specific teacher training. This research could improve the ability of teachers in European countries to have a positive influence on Muslim students.

Chapters 1, 2, and 11 also have stimulating insights regarding RE. In chapter 1, Julia Ippgrave focuses on relationships between local religious practices and the attitudes of young people to those of their peers. Her findings are surprising, inasmuch as RE had less impact on young people than the religion in the neighborhood and being “religious.” Olga Schihalejev’s essay in chapter 2 reviews a quantitative project related to young people’s attitudes toward religious diversity. Chapter 11 is a particularly interesting essay focusing on the purposes of Christian youth work. In this essay Naomi Stanton explores how such youth work serves to build communities of faith that will continue as youth become adults. Key findings include relationships and engagement as ways to connect young people to churches as they become young adults.

The rest of the chapters focus on varying topics related to current issues in RE. These include young people’s attitudes toward religion, perspectives on the psychology of religion, and reflections on religion from young British Sikhs. This collection of essays and research studies provides much background and information on RE; yet with any edited volume, the voice of the authors vary, as do the research designs. Taken as a whole, the collection gathered by the editors provides a thought-provoking variety of information that moves the reader to think more deeply about RE.

## REVIEWS

This book would serve as a great resource for anyone researching RE or working in the field of RE who desires more background on the current challenges and research in RE.

*Randall J. King*