

Language, Location and Perceptions of RE in Welsh Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

A detailed questionnaire containing Likert-type attitude scales to assess teachers' perceptions of religious education and worship was completed by 361 of the 577 headteachers employed by the Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, Newport and Cardiff local education authorities. The findings showed that headteachers in village schools were more likely than those in town schools to favour a more traditional type of RE. The differences between Welsh-medium and English-medium headteachers were even more pronounced, with Welsh-medium headteachers putting a stronger emphasis on Christian-based RE than their English counterparts. These findings draw attention to the importance of children receiving a balanced religious education, regardless of the location or language of their school.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is twofold: to explore Welsh headteachers' attitudes towards the teaching of religious education in the primary school; and to examine whether the language and location of the school for which the headteacher is responsible has an influence upon those attitudes.

There are several previous studies that have explored teachers' attitudes to religious education in schools. One of the earliest was conducted by May (1968) who carried out a nationwide survey among teachers in all types of maintained schools to find out their attitudes to religious and moral education. The survey revealed that 'teachers overwhelmingly agreed (almost 95 per cent) that children should be taught to know about and to understand Christianity'. Teachers were

also asked to number in order of importance reasons why children should be taught to understand Christianity. Highest priority was given to educational and cultural reasons followed by moral and social reasons respectively.

Jarvis (1978) reported on an investigation undertaken by the Warley Agreed Syllabus Conference to find out the aims of junior school teachers in their religious education lessons. According to Jarvis, teachers' responses were similar regardless of whether they were male or female or whether they worked in a state school or a church school. However, the older the teachers the more likely they were to include religious aims such as 'communicating knowledge of the Bible, belief in God and knowledge of Christ's teaching'. Communicating moral ideas was a common choice amongst teachers of all ages. Jarvis also found that the more religious teachers considered themselves to be, the more likely they were to include amongst their aims belief in God or knowledge of Christ's teaching. They were, however, no less likely to have moral aims in their religious education lessons than teachers who considered themselves less religious. Jarvis expressed concern that, in a multicultural area like Warley, England, almost a third of the respondents felt that an aim of RE lessons should be to encourage children to become Christians. He also expressed concern that, although many teachers considered RE as a 'vehicle for moral education', they did not always give adequate thought to the complexity of children's moral development and suitable consideration when teaching this aspect to pupils' own experiences. A further concern expressed by Jarvis was that so few teachers had child-centred aims for their RE lessons.

Francis (1986) undertook a survey in the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, England, which looked at the understanding of the church school system by teachers who worked in church schools, their commitment to it as well as the attitudes they showed towards it. Although the study found considerable differences in the attitudes of teachers in both aided and controlled schools there was general goodwill towards the church school system and support for the distinctiveness of church schools. The survey also showed that older teachers tended to have more positive attitudes towards church schools and their distinctiveness than younger ones and that church-going teachers had more positive attitudes than non-churchgoing ones.

A similar study undertaken by Wilcox and Francis (1996) in Church of England voluntary schools within the diocese of Newcastle, England, in 1992 came to three conclusions. First, the majority of teachers supported the continuing role of church schools. Second, one of the main influences on teachers' attitudes towards the church school system was their personal religious commitment. Churchgoing teachers were found to show more positive

attitudes towards the church school system than non-churchgoers. They were also more willing to assert the distinctiveness of church schools. Third, the other factor which influenced attitudes towards the church school system was the teachers' ages. Older teachers had more positive attitudes towards the church school system than younger teachers and were more concerned to emphasize the distinctiveness of church schools than younger ones. Teachers' position on the promotional ladder made no difference to attitudes.

O'Keeffe (1986) conducted a headteachers' attitudes survey which looked at their perception of the role of the church school in a multicultural, multiracial and multifaith society. The research was carried out amongst 103 Church of England and county schools in the Inner London Education Authority, the outer London boroughs, the north-west region and the West Midlands. O'Keeffe found that many county schools had made great strides 'in their efforts to cater for the cultural diversity of their pupils'. Instead of putting Christianity in the central position in their schools they transferred belief 'to the margins of useful activity'. On the other hand, it was found that Christianity retained a central position in the life and work of most church schools. Most respondents from church schools were reluctant to admit 'other faith expression' within the activity of their schools. Many had a policy of selectivity in their admission for non-Christian pupils and staff. According to O'Keeffe, this called into question one of the church's traditional roles with regard to education, namely serving the nation through its children. The message to the population at large was that Christian education was for Christian children. The headteachers in the sample primary schools were asked about their aims in teaching RE. The main aim of the respondents was promoting an understanding of Christianity, as this was seen as 'being relevant to all pupils regardless of background'. The respondents' approach to religious education varied between a 'personal quest for meaning' to 'promoting Christian commitment'.

In 1990, Cox and Skinner undertook a survey involving staff from five church primary schools in North Warwickshire, England, who were undergoing an in-service training course based on the then new Warwickshire Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education (Cox and Skinner, 1990). The new syllabus put a greater emphasis on multifaith RE. The results showed that most teachers welcomed the new syllabus because it opened up the subject to 'a new range of studies of a wider and multi-faith nature'. Some feared that it might be misrepresented by parents and that some teachers would feel uneasy about it. There was a general feeling that it would involve a considerable amount of work for teachers but most felt that it would be a worthwhile exercise and were prepared to undertake it with both 'interest and enthusiasm'.

Davies (2000) undertook a study in west Wales of headteachers' perceptions of religious education. He found that RE was deemed to be an essential part of the primary school curriculum by almost all headteachers (95.6 per cent). When respondents' aims in RE lessons were categorized in different groups, it was found that headteachers gave highest priority to the moral aims followed by cultural, educational and religious aims respectively. The strong emphasis on the moral dimension of RE was to some extent at odds with the views of certain educationalists who decried the fact that teachers tended to concentrate too much on the moral at the expense of the religious aspects of RE. Most headteachers demonstrated an awareness of the shift in emphasis in the aims and objectives of the subject in recent years. For the majority, the confessional approach had been replaced by the 'understanding religion approach'. However, this was not true of all respondents. Over a third (36.6 per cent) still felt that an aim of RE should be to 'encourage children to become committed Christians'. Davies noted that further research needed to be undertaken into the possible factors that influence headteachers' perceptions of RE. The present paper is an attempt to explore two possible influences on attitudes, namely the language and location of the school for which headteachers are responsible.

The survey

A detailed questionnaire was sent out to every primary school headteacher employed by six Welsh educational authorities. These were the mainly rural Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire education authorities and the mainly urban Swansea, Newport and Cardiff local education authorities. Of the 577 questionnaires sent out, 361 were returned, making a response rate of 63 per cent. Attitudes towards religious education were assessed by a five-point Likert-type scale: disagree strongly, disagree, not certain, agree and agree strongly. The data were analysed by a mainframe version of SPSS. The statistics are based on the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' categories which were merged together for the purposes of this study.

Results and discussion

Tables 1a and 1b look at headteachers' perceptions of the aims of RE. As can be seen, the majority of headteachers believe that RE has several wide-ranging aims. Headteachers place a high value on the moral aims of the subject, such as promoting good relationships, helping children make moral choices and

making children better citizens. A similarly high percentage claim that RE should be aiming to fulfil the demands of the locally agreed syllabus such as teaching children about Christianity and world religions and helping children to become aware of life's experiences and the questions they raise. A lower percentage believe that RE should have confessional aims such as encouraging pupils to become committed Christians.

Table 1a:
The aims of RE: by language of school

An aim of RE should be to	Welsh %	English %	X²	P<
teach children about Christianity	99	89	10.8	0.01
teach the children about the major religions represented in Great Britain	81	95	17.2	0.001
teach children about the Old Testament	95	81	8.4	0.01
teach children about the New Testament	99	86	15.8	0.01
help children become aware of life's experiences and the questions they raise	98	99	1.0	NS
help children make moral choices	98	99	0.0	NS
help children learn more about their own religious tradition and heritage	93	93	0.0	NS
help children acquire a faith by which to live	61	57	0.6	NS
help children develop an awareness of the expanse of the natural world	89	85	1.0	NS
help children develop an awareness of the expanse of the universe	80	74	3.4	NS
promote spiritual development	90	88	0.1	NS
promote respect, tolerance and sensitivity towards all the major religions represented in Great Britain	93	97	3.3	NS
promote self-awareness	94	97	1.6	NS
promote good relationships	97	99	1.1	NS
encourage children to become committed Christians	36	30	1.9	NS
make children better citizens	97	91	4.9	NS
lay the foundation for later religious development in secondary school	73	65	4.9	NS

Table 1b:
The aims of RE: by location of school

An aim of RE should be to	Village %	Town %	X²	P<
teach children about Christianity	97	89	7.1	0.01
teach the children about the major religions represented in Great Britain	79	88	5.1	0.05
teach children about the Old Testament	97	85	12.7	0.001
teach children about the New Testament	97	85	12.7	0.001
help children become aware of life's experiences and the questions they raise	99	98	1.1	NS
help children make moral choices	98	99	0.5	NS
help children learn more about their own religious tradition and heritage	92	94	0.4	NS
help children acquire a faith by which to live	56	60	0.7	NS
help children develop an awareness of the expanse of the natural world	87	86	0.1	NS
help children develop an awareness of the expanse of the universe	79	69	4.4	0.05
promote spiritual development	91	87	1.5	NS
promote respect, tolerance and sensitivity towards all the major religions represented in Great Britain	91	98	7.6	0.01
promote self-awareness	95	96	0.5	NS
promote good relationships	97	99	2.1	NS
encourage children to become committed Christians	33	32	0.04	NS
make children better citizens	94	93	0.06	NS
lay the foundation for later religious development in secondary school	67	69	0.3	NS

When the language of the school is taken into consideration (see Table 1a), it can be seen that Welsh-medium schools place a higher emphasis on traditional Christian teaching than do English-medium schools. Almost all Welsh-medium school headteachers (99 per cent) stated that an aim of religious education should be to teach children about Christianity (compared with 89 per cent in English-medium schools). Teaching about the Old Testament was supported by 92 per cent and teaching the New Testament supported by 99 per cent in Welsh-medium schools, compared with 81 per cent and 86 per cent respectively in English-medium schools. There was a higher degree of support for teaching children the major religions represented in Great Britain from English-medium schools than in Welsh-medium schools (95 as compared

with 81 per cent). The religious aims of religious education were given a higher percentage of support from headteachers in Welsh-medium schools.

Table 1b shows that headteachers responsible for village schools are also more inclined to place a higher emphasis on traditional Christian teaching than those in town schools. Thus, they are more inclined to claim that an aim of RE should be to teach children about Christianity (97 compared with 89 per cent); teach children about the Old Testament (97 per cent compared with 85 per cent). On the other hand, town school headteachers are more likely to support multifaith RE than village school headteachers. Thus, they are more likely to claim that an aim of RE should be to teach the children about the major religions represented in Great Britain (88 compared with 79 per cent) and promote respect, tolerance and sensitivity towards all the major religions represented in Great Britain (98 compared with 91 per cent).

Tables 2a and 2b show headteachers' views about the content and presentation of RE. Over three-quarters of the headteachers polled believe that RE lessons should make regular use of Bible stories, stories from other faiths, secular stories, published RE schemes, religious artefacts, videos, radio/TV programmes, visits and visitors. When the attitudes of the two groups are compared (see Table 1), it is clear that headteachers in Welsh-medium schools have more traditional attitudes to the teaching of religious education than their English counterparts. Welsh-medium headteachers are significantly less likely to support the regular use of stories from other faiths in their religious education programmes than English-medium headteachers (78 compared with 87 per cent). Similarly, Welsh-medium headteachers are less favourably disposed to using secular stories in religious education lessons than English-medium headteachers (71 compared with 85 per cent).

On the other hand, the use of TV and radio programmes is more popular amongst Welsh-medium headteachers than their English counterparts. Thus, 88 per cent of the respondents in Welsh schools thought that radio programmes and 94 per cent thought that TV programmes should be used to teach religious education compared with 75 and 83 per cent respectively in English-medium schools. Not having enough resources in their first language is one of the major problems which faces Welsh-medium schools when trying to teach religious education. TV and radio programmes are very cost-effective resources which are available to all schools. Little wonder, therefore, given the existence of suitable Welsh-language programmes, that Welsh-medium schools embrace the modern technology with open arms. Whilst TV and radio programmes are also welcome in English-medium schools, they are not given the same priority because of the existence of a wider variety of other teaching resources in English.

Table 2a:
The content and presentation of RE: by language of school

RE lessons should make regular use of	Welsh %	English %	X²	P<
Bible stories	96	95	0.5	NS
stories from other faiths	78	87	4.7	0.05
secular stories	71	85	9.0	0.01
published RE schemes	75	74	0.0	NS
religious artefacts	94	94	0.0	NS
videos	93	90	1.1	NS
radio programmes	88	75	8.9	0.01
TV programmes	94	83	8.3	0.01
visits to places of worship	98	98	0.8	NS
visits by members of faith communities	98	92	5.1	0.05

Table 2b:
The content and presentation of RE: by location of school

RE lessons should make regular use of	Village %	Town %	X²	P<
Bible stories	95	95	0.07	NS
stories from other faiths	73	86	6.5	0.01
secular stories	73	84	6.1	0.01
published RE schemes	72	76	0.5	NS
religious artefacts	89	96	8.2	0.001
videos	90	91	0.2	NS
radio programmes	83	77	1.4	NS
TV programmes	89	86	0.2	NS
visits to places of worship	97	98	0.4	NS
visits by members of faith communities	93	94	0.1	NS

Table 2b reveals that town school headteachers demonstrate a greater enthusiasm for a broader content for RE lessons than their village counterparts. Thus, they are more likely to be enthusiastic about using stories from other faiths (86 compared with 73 per cent) and secular stories (84 compared with 73 per cent). They are also more likely to want to use religious artefacts in RE lessons (96 compared with 89 per cent).

Table 3a:
World religions should not be taught in Welsh primary schools:
by language of school

Agree	Welsh %	English %	X²	P<
Wales is a predominantly Christian country	16	9	3.5	NS
All religions are not equally valid	19	5	4.8	0.05
Faith is not a pick 'n' mix affair	28	20	3.2	NS
Non-Christian countries do not teach their children about Christianity	18	13	1.5	NS
School is where the Christian culture is transmitted from generation to generation	27	24	0.2	NS
Young children can get confused if they encounter too many faiths	50	29	15.3	0.001
Learning about other religions might lead the children to abandon their faith in Christianity	14	8	2.4	NS
Christianity is the only way to the truth	15	17	0.2	NS
There is not enough time to do justice to Christianity let alone other religions	52	19	41.8	0.001

Table 3b:
World religions should not be taught in Welsh primary schools:
by location of school

Agree	Village %	Town %	X²	P<
Wales is a predominantly Christian country	16	8	5.3	NS
All religions are not equally valid	18	14	0.8	NS
Faith is not a pick 'n' mix affair	27	20	2.0	NS
Non-Christian countries do not teach their children about Christianity	17	13	1.1	NS
School is where the Christian culture is transmitted from generation to generation	24	27	0.4	NS
Young children can get confused if they encounter too many faiths	40	34	4.8	NS
Learning about other religions might lead the children to abandon their faith in Christianity	13	8	1.9	NS
Christianity is the only way to the truth	12	19	3.3	NS
There is not enough time to do justice to Christianity let alone other religions	39	30	4.9	NS

Tables 3a and 3b look at headteachers' responses to a series of arguments advanced against the teaching of world religions. Both tables show that the majority of the respondents from both English- and Welsh-medium schools disagree with most of these statements. However, as can be seen in Table 3a, once again Welsh-medium headteachers display more traditional attitudes and are more inclined to have concerns about teaching world religions than headteachers of English-medium schools. Two issues about teaching world religions are of particular concern to Welsh-medium headteachers. The first is that there is not enough time to do justice to Christianity let alone other religions. Over half of the Welsh-medium headteachers (52 per cent) expressed this concern compared with only a fifth (19 per cent) of English-medium headteachers. One possibility is that headteachers in Welsh-medium schools feel that they have an extra core subject (that is, Welsh as well as English, mathematics and science) to teach and that coping with other religions in addition to Christianity on top of this is asking too much. The second major concern of Welsh-medium headteachers is that young children might become confused if they encounter too many faiths. This was a concern expressed by a half (50 per cent) of the respondents in Welsh-medium schools but only three-tenths (29 per cent) of those in English-medium schools. Differences also emerged regarding the view that multifaith religious education should be avoided because all faiths are not equally valid. This was a view held by 19 per cent of Welsh-medium headteachers compared with 5 per cent of English-medium headteachers. These findings suggest that, although the majority of Welsh-medium headteachers are not opposed to multifaith religious education, they do want to see it properly planned and organized so that Christianity is given its due attention and that confusion is avoided through exposure to too many religions at one time. Table 3b reveals that there are no significant differences between town and village school headteachers regarding the arguments advanced against multifaith RE.

Tables 4a and 4b look at headteachers' views about which religions should be taught in the primary school. Table 4a reveals that, in general, the language of the school has little impact on headteachers' perceptions about this issue. There is, however, a significantly lower level of support for the teaching of Buddhism and Sikhism amongst headteachers in Welsh-medium schools. While 60 per cent of Welsh-medium headteachers feel that Buddhism should be taught, this figure rises to 72 per cent among English-language school headteachers. Similarly, while the teaching of Sikhism is supported by 59 per cent of Welsh-medium headteachers, this percentage rises to 73 per cent amongst English-medium headteachers. Once again, the figures suggest a

more traditional attitude towards religious education among Welsh-medium headteachers. Table 4b reveals that no significant differences emerge between the views of village and town headteachers regarding this issue.

Table 4a:
Which faiths should be taught in primary RE:
by language of school

	Welsh %	English %	X ²	P<
Christianity	99	99	0.3	NS
Judaism	86	90	1.5	NS
Islam	78	79	0.05	NS
Jainism	9	12	0.5	NS
Zoroastrianism	6	7	0.2	NS
Humanism	14	22	3.4	NS
Hinduism	69	77	2.6	NS
Buddhism	60	72	5.8	0.01
Sikhism	59	73	6.9	0.01

Table 4b:
Which faiths should be taught in primary RE:
by location of school

	Village %	Town %	X ²	P<
Christianity	99	98	0.5	NS
Judaism	85	91	2.8	NS
Islam	76	81	1.7	NS
Jainism	10	12	0.2	NS
Zoroastrianism	5	8	1.2	NS
Humanism	18	20	0.06	NS
Hinduism	70	77	2.0	NS
Buddhism	63	71	2.2	NS
Sikhism	65	69	0.6	NS

Tables 5a and 5b explore the headteachers' views about the importance of RE compared with other subjects. They show that, for the majority of headteachers, RE is considered to be an important subject within the school curriculum and that they are reluctant to claim that any other area of the curriculum should be considered to be more important. While there are few

differences in perceptions between headteachers in Welsh-medium schools and those within English-medium schools about core subject areas, there are marked differences in their perceptions about the foundation subjects. As one would expect, the biggest difference emerges in perceptions about the importance of Welsh. The percentage of headteachers who considered Welsh to be more important than religious education was almost three times greater in Welsh-medium schools (45 per cent) than it was in English-medium schools (15 per cent). The obvious explanation for this is that Welsh-medium schools exist to provide Welsh-medium education and that, while Welsh is a core subject in Welsh schools, its status is that of foundation subject in English schools.

Table 5a:

The importance of RE compared with other subjects: by language of school

	Welsh %	English %	X ²	P<
Welsh is more important	45	15	37.6	0.001
English is more important	42	45	0.2	NS
Maths is more important	47	47	0.0	NS
Science is more important	37	24	0.3	NS
D&T is more important	10	22	9.0	0.001
History is more important	13	22	4.1	0.05
Geography is more important	13	20	3.7	0.05
PE is more important	12	21	4.9	0.05
Art is more important	8	14	3.0	NS
Music is more important	13	16	0.8	NS

Table 5b:

The importance of RE compared with other subjects: by location of school

	Village %	Town %	X ²	P<
Welsh is more important	35	20	11.2	0.01
English is more important	44	43	0.04	NS
Maths is more important	50	44	1.5	NS
Science is more important	39	39	0.02	NS
D&T is more important	14	20	2.2	NS
History is more important	18	18	0.02	NS
Geography is more important	19	17	0.14	NS
PE is more important	16	19	0.5	NS
Art is more important	11	13	0.4	NS
Music is more important	15	15	0.006	NS

The figures suggest that religious education is given a higher status in Welsh-medium schools than in English-medium schools. Thus while 22 per cent of headteachers in English-medium schools believe that D&T is more important than religious education, this figure drops to 10 per cent for those in Welsh-medium schools. While 22 per cent of headteachers in English-medium schools believe that history is more important than religious education, the percentage drops to 13 per cent for those in Welsh-medium schools. Similarly, while 21 per cent of headteachers in English-medium schools believe that PE is more important than religious education, this figure drops to 12 per cent for those in Welsh-medium schools.

Table 5b reveals that, in the main, town and village school headteachers have similar views regarding the importance of RE compared with other subjects. The only subject for which significant differences emerge is Welsh. Thirty-five per cent of village school headteachers consider it to be more important than RE, compared with 20 per cent of those in town schools. These figures clearly reflect the fact that a significant number of the village schools in this sample are also Welsh-medium schools.

Table 6a:
What children should be taught to believe: by language of school

	Welsh %	English %	X ²	P<
that there is a God	69	57	5.1	0.05
that the Bible is true	50	40	5.3	0.05
that they should pray	73	58	7.5	0.01
to sing Christian hymns which are appropriate for their age and aptitude	93	82	7.7	0.01
to say the Lord's Prayer	90	79	7.2	0.01

Table 6b:
What children should be taught to believe: by location of school

	Village %	Town %	X ²	P<
that there is a God	58	64	1.7	NS
that the Bible is true	42	46	10.5	NS
that they should pray	69	63	0.01	NS
to sing Christian hymns which are appropriate for their age and aptitude	89	84	2.3	NS
to say the Lord's Prayer	86	81	1.4	NS

Tables 6a and 6b set out to profile views about whether children should be taught what to believe. The figures in Table 6a demonstrate that headteachers of Welsh-medium schools are more inclined to want RE in their schools to have confessional aims than their English-medium counterparts. Headteachers in Welsh-medium primary schools are more likely than those in English-medium schools to say that children should be taught: to sing Christian hymns which are appropriate to their age and aptitude (93 compared with 82 per cent); that they should pray (73 compared with 58 per cent); to say the Lord's Prayer (90 compared with 79 per cent); that there is a God (69 compared with 57 per cent); and that the Bible is true (50 compared with 40 per cent). Table 6b reveals that the location of a school makes little difference to headteachers' views regarding whether children should be taught what to believe.

Table 7a:
The meaning of the term worship for primary school children:
by language of school

	Welsh %	English %	X ²	P<
paying reverence or veneration to a divine being or power	65	51	6.6	0.01
showing commitment to certain religious beliefs	50	38	4.73	0.05
experiencing periods of stillness, silence and reflection	92	95	1.0	NS
giving 'worth' ('worship') to concepts, principles and conduct which are worthy of celebration	91	93	0.5	NS
sharing in deeper levels of ordinary experience	66	78	4.7	0.05
acquainting children with some rituals, language and beliefs employed by faith communities	66	72	1.2	NS

Tables 7a and 7b look at headteachers' views about the meaning of the term 'worship' within the primary school context. It shows that schools define worship in a range of different ways, the most popular definitions being 'experiencing periods of stillness, silence and reflection' and 'giving "worth" (worship) to concepts which are worthy of celebration', while the least popular was 'showing commitment to certain religious beliefs'. Table 7a shows that Welsh-medium headteachers are more inclined to have traditional attitudes to school worship and are more likely to stress the religious aspects in their

Table 7b:
The meaning of the term worship for primary school children:
by location of school

	Village %	Town %	X ²	P<
paying reverence or veneration to a divine being or power	55	57	0.07	NS
showing commitment to certain religious beliefs	41	43	0.03	NS
experiencing periods of stillness, silence and reflection	95	92	0.9	NS
giving 'worth' ('worship') to concepts, principles and conduct which are worthy of celebration	95	93	0.2	NS
sharing in deeper levels of ordinary experience	71	77	1.3	NS
acquainting children with some rituals, language and beliefs employed by faith communities	65	73	2.4	NS

definition. Thus, while 51 per cent of English-medium headteachers claim that worship in the primary school should mean paying reverence or veneration to a divine being or power, this figure rises to 65 per cent of Welsh-medium headteachers. Similarly, while only a third (38 per cent) of English-medium headteachers say that primary school worship should mean showing commitment to certain religious beliefs, this rises to a half (50 per cent) of Welsh-medium headteachers. English-medium headteachers are more likely to emphasize the experiential aspect of worship. Four-fifths (78 per cent) of English-medium headteachers felt that worship meant sharing in deeper levels of ordinary experience compared with two-thirds (66 per cent) of Welsh-medium headteachers. Table 7b reveals that few differences emerge between the views of headteachers in town and village schools regarding the meaning of the term 'worship'.

Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from these data. First, a general picture emerges from the figures of headteachers' perceptions of RE. They show that most headteachers feel that RE should have several wide-ranging aims. Most believe that the subject should contribute to pupils' moral development as well as enabling them to learn about Christianity and world religions and help them

to be aware of life's experiences and the problems that they raise. A minority feels that the subject should still have confessional aims. Most feel that RE should make regular use of a variety of different approaches such as visits, visitors and artefacts.

Although over two-thirds of the sample feel that more than half the teaching time in RE lessons should be given to the teaching of Christianity, multifaith RE is generally well supported. Over three-quarters feel that Christianity, Judaism and Islam should be taught in the primary school. More than half feel that Buddhism, Sikhism and Hinduism should be taught. A significantly lower percentage thinks that humanism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism should be taught. RE is considered to be an important part of the curriculum by most headteachers. Fewer than half of the sample is willing to claim that any of the other subjects of the curriculum are more important.

The term 'worship' is ascribed a variety of meanings within the primary school. Over 90 per cent of the sample feel that it should mean experiencing periods of stillness, silence and reflection; and giving worth (worthship) to concepts, principles and conduct worthy of celebration. Less than half believe that the term should mean showing commitment to certain religious beliefs.

Second, the figures show that the location of a school does have some impact upon headteachers' perceptions of religious education. In particular, headteachers in village schools are more likely than those in town schools to value a traditional, Christian-focused type of RE. Questioning the value of multifaith RE is by no means unknown amongst headteachers of rural schools. Its usefulness for young children in an area where contact with non-Christian faiths is minimal was questioned by more than one such respondent. One example of this was the following comment:

I disagree with this modern emphasis on teaching world religions in the primary school. Our school is located in a rural, farming community and our pupils are unlikely to meet someone from a non-Christian religion until they are much older. Right now, what they need is to gain a better understanding of their own religion. (Translated from Welsh)

Third, the figures show that an even more powerful influence on headteachers' views about RE is the language of the school for which they are responsible. Headteachers of Welsh-medium schools are more inclined to have traditional attitudes towards religious education and worship. They are more likely to put a strong emphasis on the religious aims of both RE and worship and to value a more traditional approach towards them.

Headteachers in Welsh-medium schools are more inclined to want their pupils to learn about the religious situation in Wales, whereas headteachers in English-medium schools are more inclined to encourage their children to learn about the broader picture. Thus, in general, English-medium headteachers show a greater enthusiasm for multifaith religious education than Welsh-medium headteachers. Encouraging children to learn about Christianity and their own Welsh Christian heritage is given higher priority by headteachers in Welsh schools. Thus, one Welsh-medium headteacher expressed her concern about multifaith religious education in the following manner:

I do not think that we should be teaching about other religions in the primary school. Why teach children about Indian festivals such as Divali when they should be learning about important Welsh traditions such as 'y Plygain' at that time of year? We are in danger of undermining our own Welsh culture by our enthusiasm to teach the traditions of other countries. (Translated from Welsh)

On the whole Welsh-medium headteachers tend to look at school worship in more traditional terms than English-medium headteachers. They show a greater tendency to emphasize the religious aspects in their definitions of worship.

While the more positive attitudes towards multifaith RE found in town schools might be explained with reference to the more multicultural nature of urban communities, what is less clear is why language has an even greater influence on perceptions. The explanation may be that headteachers' perceptions of RE and worship, like every other aspect of school life, are likely to be influenced by the way they view the mission of their schools. Part of the mission of every Welsh-medium school is likely to be the transmission of the Welsh language and culture to its pupils. While this is likely to be part of the mission of an English-medium school in Wales too, it is not unreasonable to assume that there would be a greater emphasis on these aspects in a Welsh-medium school. Headteachers in a Welsh-medium school are likely to be aware that throughout the centuries, the Welsh language and culture have been closely linked to the development of Christianity in the country. Teaching children about their Welsh heritage would be impossible without reference to its Christian roots.

Historians acknowledge the powerful influence that religion has had on the survival of the Welsh language. Hundreds of Welsh place names commemorate the enormous influence of the Celtic saints on the Welsh way of

life. The translation of the Bible into Welsh in 1588 and the influence of Griffith Jones's circulating schools, the Welsh Sunday school movement and the various Welsh religious revivals ensured that the Welsh language was kept alive at a time when the numbers speaking other Celtic languages were rapidly declining. All Welsh-medium headteachers would be aware of the strong link between the nation's Christian history and that of the language. They would also be aware that many Welsh customs are directly linked to the nation's religious traditions. Understandably, therefore, headteachers of Welsh-medium schools, into whose hands the transmission of the Welsh culture from one generation to the next has been handed, have a high regard for teaching Christianity. In Wales, the link between Christianity and the Welsh language has existed for a long time and headteachers are reluctant to sever this link. Many Welsh-speaking headteachers would feel that the Welsh language and culture is still under threat.

The figures presented in this survey have shown that headteachers who are responsible for rural schools tend to have more traditional views about religious education, and that those in charge of Welsh-medium schools have even more traditional views. They have shown that headteachers' professional judgements regarding religion in schools are often linked to the type of school in which they work. They also point to the very real challenge facing those in charge of teaching RE in Wales today, namely to ensure that all our pupils, regardless of the location or language of their school, not only receive a religious education which takes proper account both of their own Welsh religious heritage but also gives careful consideration to the religious heritage the wider world of which they are also a part.

Notes

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¹ The tables show Pearson's chi-square (or X^2). In each case, the X^2 indicates the differences between the observed and expected frequencies. The column P< indicates whether or not the differences are statistically significant. The statistically significant cut-off point commonly used by statisticians, namely, the 0.05 level and 0.01 level has been used.

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