



24a Shap Publications – A Review Article by Bob Jackson, commissioned to help chart a passage through the development of Shap inspired books and articles edited and written by Members of the Working Party

The Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education and Its Books

Robert Jackson

I first encountered 'Shap' as a young teacher in a secondary school in an English city. It was clear, from the school context that I worked in, that religious education was undergoing various processes of change. Increasing secularisation in society was reflected in the changing attitudes of school students to the subject 'religious education' (RE). I found the majority of students to be interested in studying religions, while resistant to the idea that RE lessons should be steering them towards the adoption of a particular point of view. This was particularly evident with older students who enjoyed both learning about religions and debating matters concerned with religion. A vivid memory is of lively discussion and debate about issues of religion and belief within a sixth form (17+) general studies group. Students who disagreed with one another expressed and defended their own various religious and secular positions strongly, while listening attentively to the views of others. Everyone was open to new learning, and all could contain personal disagreements in a civil way. The school itself was becoming more pluralistic in intake, with a wider variety of religions and ethnicities represented as the years passed. Contact was made with various religious groups in the locality, often through parents who were involved in different communities within the city.

As the subject developed, an excellent new resource became available which was immediately relevant to the changing context within the school. I cannot remember how I first encountered *Shap Mailing*, but the materials I received periodically through the post were immediately useful, and totally relevant to the situation in which I taught.

My next encounter with *Shap* was through attending the first Southern Shap conference in 1972, held at Goldsmiths College in London. The organiser of this memorable event was Brian Gates. Brian and I had both been students on the Cambridge Postgraduate Certificate in Education course in RE, and it was Brian (who had already done a Masters degree in the field), rather than the course tutors, who introduced me to the work of scholars such as Edwin Cox, Harold Loukes and Ninian Smart. The Southern Shap course combined excellent academic input, from the likes of Eric Sharpe and Geoffrey Parrinder, with thoughtful and highly relevant pedagogical contributions on teaching about Hinduism. A key resource introduced at the conference, which for me was a gateway to the Hindu tradition, was John Hinnells' and Eric Sharpe's newly



published book *Hinduism* (Hinnells and Sharpe 1972). The format of the book – a wide range of concise, readable articles written mainly by academic specialists, but with contributions from teachers and teacher educators – made it immediately usable by busy teachers.

Reading *Hinduism* motivated me to acquire and read what had been the first book of the Shap Working Party. This was *Comparative Religion in Education*, edited by John Hinnells (Hinnells 1970), which included expanded versions of the papers presented at the first Shap conference. John Hinnells, at the time of publication, was a Lecturer in what was then called 'the Comparative Study of Religion' at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. He met with teachers and teacher educators, including Donald Butler, Alasdair Mackenzie, Owen Cole and Gordon Smith, and they conducted a piece of research on 'The Comparative Study of Religion in West Riding Schools' which Hinnells reported in his chapter in *Comparative Religion in Education*.

Hinnells, Butler, Mackenzie, Cole and Smith had the idea of a conference focusing on 'the comparative study of religion' in schools and colleges of education. Through Hinnells, they recruited an impressive range of speakers, including Ninian Smart and Eric Sharpe from Lancaster University and Geoffrey Parrinder from King's College in the University of London. Consultation with staff in the Adult Education Department at Newcastle University led Hinnells to follow their recommendation to use the Shap Wells Hotel in the village of Shap in Cumbria as the venue for the conference. Donald Butler reported that, during the conference, 'Almost by the merest suggestion, a group, from the platform and from the audience, met informally over coffee, and in spite of Saturday afternoon sport on television, became the Shap Working Party' (Butler 1977, 205).

Hinnells organised the publication of the conference papers with a Newcastle-based publisher, Oriel Press. Most contributors used the term 'comparative study of religion' in relation to studies in schools and their contributions, but it is interesting that Ninian Smart was already pointing out the inadequacy of this term, suggesting the use of alternatives such as 'the study of religion', and even contemplating inclusion of the study of 'non-religion' (Smart 1970).

Follow-up conferences were held at the Shap Wells Hotel, including the second in September 1969, attended by Riadh el Droubie and Harold Blackham among others, and at which the terms 'Religious Studies' and 'World Religions' were discussed. However, new venues emerged as Shap responded to the need for events in other parts of the country. Hence, for example, the first Southern Shap conference, held at Goldsmiths College, London in 1972, and the emergence of York Shap and South Coast Shap in Chichester (for further details of the history of the working party see Mary Hayward's online article (Hayward, no date)).



I continued to use Shap's resources, and was invited to write an article for *Shap Mailing* about educational broadcasts I had made for BBC Radio 4 on religious communities in Britain (Jackson 1979). Around this time I was invited to join the Working Party. What was striking about participation in Shap – with just 35 or so members – was its inclusion of specialists from different branches of the education system, all working collaboratively. Leading academics from universities were partnered by teachers – including primary and secondary teachers and those focusing on children with special needs – as well as teacher educators and advisers from local authorities and faith-based education. The members were from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds. Despite the diversity of belief and practice in the working party, members worked closely together in the cause of deepening pupils' knowledge and understanding of religions.

As indicated above, Shap's early publications were an excellent resource for many of us who were then teaching in schools and colleges of education. What I had first encountered as *Shap Mailing* evolved into *World Religions: Aids for Teachers* (Woodward 1972). This included a calendar of religious festivals, information on audio visual aids and periodicals, a substantial collection of bibliographies on different religious traditions, and lists of books for use in schools. There was also a report on the working party and a section on tools for the classroom, from infant to secondary, plus suggestions of resources from religious bodies, and a list of useful addresses.

World Religions: Aids for Teachers evolved into *World Religions: a Handbook for Teachers* (Cole 1978). Contents included a variety of general articles ranging from Ninian Smart's 'Comparative Religion Clichés' – reproduced below, and important to re-read in a climate where there is some misrepresentation of teaching about religious diversity – to Mary Hayward's widely used article on 'The use of visits in religious education', also reproduced below. *World Religions: a Handbook for Teachers* also includes a section on project work with younger children, and a collection of pieces introducing religions and philosophies. Bibliographies were listed on a wide variety of topics, together with a list of useful addresses.

In turn, *World Religions: a Handbook for Teachers* was reshaped as the *Shap Handbook on World Religions in Education* (Brown *et al.* 1987). In addition to substantial listings of resources on a range of religions plus humanism, there was a collection of concise articles including three dealing with teaching about world religions in Christian and Jewish faith-based contexts. My own chapter, 'Religious Education: A Middle Way' is reproduced below, as is Clive Erricker's article on 'New Religious Movements'.

In parallel to these 'core' Shap texts – and following on from the seminal Hinnells' *Comparative Religion in Education* and Hinnells' and Sharpe's *Hinduism*



– various books appeared produced primarily for teachers and teacher educators, and written or edited by members of the Working Party. Some of these were produced specifically by Shap, while others were written or edited by Shap members, complementing the working party's thinking. Extracts from a selection of these are reproduced below.

Ninian Smart is well known for establishing the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster. Partly through his early work with the Shap Working Party, he also took a strong interest in religious education in schools, and initiated a research and development project on religious education in secondary schools, sponsored by the Schools Council. Mary Hayward, a member of the Shap Working Party, was also a member of Smart's team. This project produced an influential working paper, *Religious Education in Secondary Schools* (Schools Council 1971). Smart, with the project's deputy director Donald Horder, also co-edited a book entitled *New Movements in Religious Education* (Smart and Horder 1975). Horder's chapter from this volume 'Religious Education in Secondary Schools', reproduced below, summarises some of the project's key ideas. The project advocated two complementary approaches as suitable for the state-funded secondary schools of democratic states. These were identified as the 'explicit religion' approach, utilising the phenomenology of religion as a grounding methodology, and the 'implicit religion' approach, focusing on issues of personal concern to school students. Religious education was seen as a creative combination of these two, with 'explicit religion' content selected with reference to the particular context in which the subject was being taught. While the use of phenomenology was emphasised in the Schools Council project, Smart's own work was eclectic, drawing on various disciplines, including philosophy, theology, history of religions and Buddhology (Gates 2016a, 26; Smart 1968).

Brian Gates' edited book *Afro-Caribbean Religions* is very much in the Shap tradition. As Gates remarks, in his introduction:

Throughout this book there runs a concern for community understanding at both a domestic and an international level... Yet how to cope creatively with this immediate diversity is a problem, not least for schools and colleges. If pupils' imaginations were aroused sufficiently to prompt them to explore the foundations of any one of the several communities in our midst, the problem might be overcome. At the same time, bridges might be built, not only to Europe, but to Africa, China, India and SE Asia (Gates 1980, 1).

The book includes contributions from a wide range of specialists including from Shap members Geoffrey Parrinder (the African spiritual universe), Owen Cole (secondary school projects) and Brian Gates (the scope of religion in education), as well as input from academics such as Harold Turner and educators, including



Kathy Williams. Gates himself comments on the book's Shap connection: 'The book as a whole is the product of a group of people brought together at the instigation of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, conscious of the need for a general reference book on Afro-Caribbean religion' (Gates 1980, 2).

My own edited book *Approaching World Religions* (Jackson 1982) included contributions from Shap members Ninian Smart, Jean Holm, Peter Woodward, Owen Cole, John Hull, Brian Gates and myself, together with chapters from a variety of contributors including Robin Richardson, Allan Hawke, Dennis Starkings, Marilyn Thomas, Eric Pain, Richard Tames and Raymond Hammer, then Director of the Bible Reading Fellowship. In his Foreword, Smart reiterated his view that there are both personal and social reasons for young people to have knowledge and understanding of the range of human beliefs and practices. He remarks:

This is so for personal reasons, because for good or ill our world is now a plural one, in which the different religious traditions are meeting in our cities and through the media... It is better for people to face this pluralism and benefit from its riches rather than to retreat into too closed a commitment. Socially, the exploration of religion is obviously important, since it is necessary for people of different persuasions and customs to live together in their immediate environment and in the world at large. (Smart 1982, iii)

The book includes 16 chapters divided into 5 sections each with chapters dealing with issues related to: the classroom; pluralism; commitment; personal development; and moral and political education. Jean Holm's chapter on 'World Religions in Primary Schools' is reproduced below. My own work moved on with the development of the interpretive approach, addressing issues of method in religious education, drawing on fields including ethnography, social psychology and literary theory (Jackson 1997, 2004, 2019).

1986 saw the publication of *Festivals in World Religions*, edited by Alan Brown, the first substantial treatment of this topic, covering a variety of religions of the world plus coverage of national and secular festivals, and a chapter on observing festivals in schools (Brown 1986). Geoffrey Parrinder's introduction to the book is reproduced below (Parrinder 1986), as is Peter Woodward's chapter on observing festivals in schools (Woodward 1986). A second edition of the book appeared twelve years later, edited by Peter Woodward, with the assistance of Cherry Gould and Riadh el Droubie (Woodward 1998), and including a chapter on festivals in the primary classroom by David Rose, and another on the secondary classroom by Peter Woodward himself. Both of these chapters are reproduced below.

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



1989 was the 20th anniversary of the Shap Working Party and, to mark this event, Angela Wood was invited to edit a collection of papers, most of them published previously in Shap publications. With the assistance of Vida Barnett, Cherry Gould and Peggy Morgan, Angela Wood assembled articles under the two broad headings of 'Religions' and 'Education'. In addition, Owen Cole, Mary Hayward and Clive Erricker reflected on their experience as editors of the Shap Mailing at different times, and I, as Chair of Shap at the time, contributed a foreword to the book, summarising the working party's contributions over 20 years. Angela Wood's editorial for this volume appears below.

In 1993, the working party produced *Teaching World Religions: A Teacher's Handbook*, with Clive Erricker as lead editor, assisted by Alan Brown, Mary Hayward, Dilip Kadodwala and Paul Williams (Erricker et al. 1993). Several chapters are reproduced below, namely John Rankin's piece on 'Teaching World Religions in Schools: Methods and Strategies', together with chapters providing observations from religious 'insiders', including Clive Lawton's 'The Jewish Perspective', and two chapters written jointly by a religious insider, and a scholar of that religion who was not a practitioner. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi collaborated in writing about different Sikh groups, while John Hinnells and Rashna Writer wrote jointly, from a Zoroastrian perspective, about being a religious minority in contemporary Britain.

In 1996, Brian Gates edited a volume entitled *Freedom and Authority in Religions and Religious Education* (Gates 1996). Part One of the book, on 'Religions', included an opening chapter on 'World Religions: the Boundaries of Belief and Unbelief' by John Bowker, followed by six chapters on freedom and authority in particular religious traditions, and two chapters (about Northern Ireland and Israel) on freedom and authority in the life of a nation. Part Two of the book, on 'Religious Education', began with a piece by John Hull on freedom and authority in religious education, followed by six chapters by various authors, on orthodoxy and openness in the experience of children from a variety of religious backgrounds. Part Two closes with international perspectives from continental Europe and from the United States, and a short conclusion from the editor on the contribution of Shap to the development of religious education in the UK.

Mention should be made of other significant publications by Shap members. Ursula King, among her many publications, edited *Turning Points in Religious Studies*, dedicated to one of Shap's leading contributors, Geoffrey Parrinder, in celebration of his 80th birthday (King 1991). The book includes chapters by Shap members John Hinnells, Brian Gates, Michael Combemere, Owen Cole and myself. Ursula King's own 80th birthday, together with her highly significant contribution to the academic study of religions, was celebrated with the publication of a special issue (Vol 19) of the *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions* (Corrywright and Schmidt 2017), including an article by



Shap member Peggy Morgan, discussing King's contribution to the Working Party.

The late Owen Cole's engaging and sometimes moving autobiography, *Cole Sahib: The Story of a Multifaith Journey*, contains many references to his close involvement with the Shap Working Party (Cole 2009), while Brian Gates' edited collection *Religion and Nationhood* (Gates 2016b), makes a substantial contribution to the international literature on religion and education, giving authors opportunities to air a variety of positions in some significant debates. In offering concluding reflections, Gates remarks:

The premise of this book is that the place of religion in national systems of education is critical for the future of humanity. It matters because of religion's universality as referring to any core of final meaning or purpose which an individual finds in life... It matters because of the pervasive presence of religious beliefs and values in societies and civilisations globally... It matters because their diversity can be a source of mutual illumination and delight for the insights and cultural creativity they generate, but also because difference can inspire abrasive destruction... For all these reasons what national systems of education do with religion could not be strategically more important. (Gates 2016b, 443)

While not a Shap publication, *Religion and Nationhood* contributes very positively to the Shap tradition.

Finally, at the time of writing, we await the publication of Shap member Eleanor Nesbitt's *Sikh: Two Centuries of Western Women's Art & Writing* (Nesbitt 2019). This highly original study draws on sources including diaries, letters, missionary reports, novels, autobiographies, paintings and photographs to show how a variety of women from Europe, America and New Zealand have portrayed the religion and culture of Sikhs.

In concluding this overview of Shap and Shap-related books, it is clear that Shap has never been 'static' in its assumptions about religions and other worldviews, nor has it demanded a unified view from its members. Rather, Shap has been a forum for civil discussion and collaborative action, across the educational world, in the broad field of religions and worldviews in education.



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