Dr. L. Philip Barnes is Reader in Religious and Theological Education, King’s College London, and Visiting Professor of Religious Studies at Union Theological College, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The main focus of my research and writing in RE is on the issue of developing positive and respectful relations between individuals with different commitments and from different communities. This interest has caused me to become increasingly critical of much contemporary policy and practice in RE, which I judge to be conceptually incapable of developing both social cohesion and positive relationships between communities. Many of my writings focus on identifying and exploring the intellectual, social and ideological roots of contemporary RE and trying to explain why British RE in particular has failed to further the positive social aims of education.

Biography
I trained to be an RE teacher at Stranmillis College, Belfast, and then proceeded to study theology and philosophy at Queen’s University, Belfast, the University of Hull, and Trinity College, Dublin, where I gained a doctorate in philosophy under the tutorship of Professor John C. A. Gaskin. I taught RE in Belfast for sixteen years, becoming first head of department in a high school and then head of department in a grammar school. Before taking up my present post in the Department of Education and Professional Studies at King’s, I was lecturer in RE at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, from 1995-2004, where I had succeeded Dr John Greer, a well-known religious educator and researcher.

I am currently director of the MA in Religious Education and the MA in Jewish Education at King’s. Both programmes provide continuing professional development for RE teachers and those interested in issues relating to professional RE. I also supervise doctoral students across a range of subjects relating to RE, religious studies and theology.

Research and interest fields – and Current projects
1 Modernity and RE
There is a growing appreciation among philosophers of education and educationalists of the extent to which models of education and educational practice have been influenced by Enlightenment rationalism and post-Enlightenment Romantic reactions. Such influences have been particularly marked in the field of RE in Britain, chiefly through the influence of John Hull and the phenomenological and experiential approaches to religious education. In a number of writings, I have traced and criticized the influence of Enlightenment and Romantic assumptions in contemporary religious education. See:
2 Pluralism and RE
Much of my academic writing has focused on the issue of religious and moral pluralism in society and its implications for religion education. I am a critic of the current ruling model of British religious education, which I believe both misrepresents the nature of religion and fails to develop respect between individuals who belong to different ethnic and religious communities. See:


3 RE in Northern Ireland
The subject of religion in Northern Ireland is controversial and this naturally extends to the place of compulsory RE in the curriculum. Even before the Good Friday agreement, old hostilities between Protestants and Roman Catholics were lessening, particularly in education, and new lines of division were emerging, the most prominent being that between conservative Christians and liberals, both Christian and humanists. Some have interpreted the Good Friday agreement as giving further impetus to the secularisation of society, with the implication that Northern Ireland should ape educational developments in the rest of the United Kingdom. This has led to a vigorous debate on the nature and purpose of education and the extent to which Northern Ireland should embrace British models of multi-faith religious education. See:


4 Empirical Studies in Religion
I have engaged with empirical research on a range of subjects that is relevant to RE: spirituality, the beliefs and values of young people, particularly young people in Northern Ireland, and the use of ICT. See:


Current projects (short summary)

1 Religious conflict and Christian models of political forgiveness
I am currently working on an extended project exploring the educational, political and social implications of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness. Much of my research is stimulated by the post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland and the need to develop a distinctively Christian perspective that takes account of both the claims of justice and the need to effect reconciliation between the two communities.

2 Education, Religion and Diversity
This is the title of a book upon which I have been working for some years. It is both a critical review of a range of education strategies by religious educators to ‘deal with’ diversity in society and an attempt to develop a new model of RE that is equipped to develop mutual respect between different individuals and communities.

3 'Does RE work?' An analysis of the aims, practices and models of effectiveness of religious education in the UK

I am a member of a qualitative research project, entitled 'Does RE work?', jointly funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom. Employing an ethnographic model of enquiry, combined with practitioner research, the project seeks to investigate the meanings and intentions of RE in the school contexts in which they are situated.

Bibliography

1 Books (if possible together with a short summary or keywords)


Barnes, L.P. (in final stage of preparation) Education, Religion and Diversity: Developing a new model of religious education (Cardiff, University of Wales Press); see 4.2 above.

2 Edited Books


3 Book chapters


4 Articles in journals

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION/PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION


Panorama: An Intercultural Journal of Interdisciplinary Ethical and Religious Studies 21 (Summer/Winter): 111-121


RELIGIOUS STUDIES/THEOLOGY


EMPIRICAL RESEARCH


