

Original citation:

Thanissaro, Phra Nicholas (2016) Other religious perspectives : Buddhist. In: Gates, Brian, (ed.) Religion and Nationhood: Insider and outsider perspectives on Religious Education in England. Praktische Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart . Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 158-162. ISBN 9783161547294

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/84053/>

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Published version: https://www.mohr.de/buch/religion-and-nationhood-9783161547294?no_cache=1&tx_sgpublisher_pi1%5Bbacklink%5D=1

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

full citation: Thanissaro, P.N. (2016) Other Religious perspectives: Buddhist. In Brian Gates (Ed) Religion and Nationhood. Insider and outsider perspectives on Religion Education in England. (in press). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp.158-162.

BUDDHIST

PHRA NICHOLAS THANISSARO

The 2011 census counted 247,743 Buddhists in England and Wales¹ – of whom 238,626 were in England – a number that has not only grown by over 100,000 since the 2001 census, but which has, in a decade, increased in its proportion of the British population by 0.1%. Buddhists are not evenly spread in the UK as evidenced by both census and distribution of temples. According to the census,² the mostly urban areas where Buddhist population density is highest include boroughs of Inner London where the average figure is 1.1%, Outer London boroughs of Greenwich, Hounslow, Brent, Barnet, Harrow, Kingston on Thames (1.1-1.7%), Cambridge (1.3%), Brighton and Hove (1.0%) and Rushmoor, Hampshire (the highest density in the country at 3.3% owing to the proximity of Aldershot garrison with a high proportion of Nepali Buddhists in the Gurkha regiments). Fifty-one Theravāda Buddhist temples were counted in 2013, most numerous in the major cities – London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. There were 229 Buddhist charitable organizations registered with the charity commission in 2015.³

Since to some people's apparent surprise, Buddhists have children too,⁴ a rough idea of the likely Buddhist denominations teachers will encounter in the *classroom* can be surmised from a recent teenage research sample where just over two-thirds described themselves as Theravāda (69%), over a quarter were Mahāyāna (29%) and the remainder Vajrayāna (3%). Describing their affiliations instead, in terms of geographic Buddhist traditions (and it should be noted that ethnically western children may follow Buddhist traditions that are not western), the same teenagers described their tradition as: Sinhalese (23%), Thai (16%), Tibetan (12%), Burmese (11%), Vietnamese (9%), Japanese (5%), Bangladeshi (3%), Western (2%), Chinese (2%), Nepalese (2%) and Cambodian (1%).⁵ Buddhists are loosely organized in England – as there is no national hierarchy – but an umbrella organization, the Network of Buddhist Organizations (NBO),⁶ was formed in response to the government's insistence on having a single point of contact for community relations with Buddhists. To date no free school has been established with specifically Buddhist character, however an independent primary school, called the 'Dharma School' has been active in Brighton since 1994.⁷

¹ http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_290685.pdf

² Table QS210EW from <http://www.ons.gov.uk>

³ <http://www.charitychoice.co.uk/charities/religious/buddhism>

⁴ PEGGY MORGAN 'Buddhists have children, too!' in ANGELA WOOD (ed) Religions and Education. Shap Working Party 1969-89. Isleworth (1989). pp 103-106.

⁵ PHRA NICHOLAS THANISSARO Temple-going Teens: Religiosity and Identity of Buddhists growing up in Britain. PhD Dissertation: University of Warwick (2015) p.171.

⁶ www.nbo.org.uk

⁷ CLIVE ERRICKER 'A Buddhist Approach to Alternative Schooling: The Dharma School, Brighton, UK' In PHILIP A. WOODS and GLENYS J. WOODS (Eds) Alternative Education for the 21st Century, New York (2009) pp.83-100.

With regard to the nature of Buddhism in Britain, some have ethnic roots in the countries of Asia while others have converted to Buddhism independent of their family's influence. The twofold provenance of Buddhists in western society was first highlighted by differences between the religious styles of 'convert' and 'heritage' recognized in studies of North American "parallel Buddhist congregations".⁸ The 'convert' style of Buddhist religiosity is practised mostly by Caucasians or by those who do not have ancestry from Asia. It is a style of Buddhist practice that emphasises meditation and tends to eschew monasticism, devotions, Buddhism's ethical precepts, the worldly benefits of Buddhism and its social activities.⁹ The 'heritage' style of Buddhist religiosity by contrast (also known as 'immigrant', 'migrant', 'ethnic', 'cradle', 'old-line' or 'indigenous' Buddhism), is the religious style of Buddhists connected ethnically with Asian countries where Buddhism has a majority presence. Typical practices for heritage-style Buddhists include generosity, chanting, meditation, listening to Buddhist teachings at a temple, bowing to the monastic community, taking temporary ordination as novice monks, showing respect towards parents, Buddhist iconography of shrines in the home, support for the monastic community, ceremonial marking of rites of passage and dedication of merit for deceased ancestors.¹⁰ Since the 1980s there has been significant influx of heritage Buddhists to Britain overtaking 'convert' Buddhists as the majority¹¹ with correspondingly more Buddhist-raised children studying in British schools. In 2015 the proportion of heritage Buddhists to converts was about 3:2. Census figures of 2011 suggested that Buddhists in schools average 0.2-0.4% of the total schoolchildren.¹²

The inclusion of Buddhism in RE in England was largely confined to 16- to 18-year-olds until the 1970s, though Geoffrey Parrinder's *Book of World Religions*¹³ was accessible to a wider readership of younger pupils. In successive editions from 1972 onwards the Shap Working Party's *World Religions: Aids for Teachers* included bibliographies and resources on Buddhism.¹⁴ Several agreed syllabuses encouraged some attention to Buddhism and this became widespread following the 1988 Education Reform Act,¹⁵ although at that time the basis for selection of 'principal' religions was unclear.¹⁶ Subsequently, the SCAA Model Syllabuses¹⁷ elaborated Buddhist content as a curriculum option and 10 years later in the *National Framework for RE* the DfES and QCA recognised Buddhism as belonging to those principal religions to be studied in RE.¹⁸ In terms of representation in RE,¹⁹ the Buddhist

⁸ PAUL D NUMRICH 'Two Buddhisms Further Considered' in *Contemporary Buddhism*, 4:1(2003) pp 55-78.

⁹ JAN NATTIER 'Visible & Invisible: the Politics of Representation in Buddhist America' in *Tricycle Buddhist Review* 5:1 (1995) pp 42-49.

¹⁰ JOYCE MILLER *The Forest Hermitage: an ethnographic study of a Buddhist community in Warwickshire*. MA Dissertation: University of Warwick (1992).

¹¹ ROBERT BLUCK 'Mapping the Buddhist Landscape' in *British Buddhist Landscape: Transplantation and Growth*, Taplow (2008).

¹² Document CT0016 from <http://www.ons.gov.uk>

¹³ London (1965).

¹⁴ Edited successively by Peter Woodward and Owen Cole. Final version: ALAN BROWN (ed) *Shap Handbook on World Religions in Education*, London (1987). Textbooks included: DAVID NAYLOR *Thinking about Buddhism*, London (1976), ANN BANCROFT *The Buddhist World*, London: Macdonald (1984) and PEGGY MORGAN *Buddhism in the Twentieth Century*, London (1985). Cf the entire edition of *BJRE* 9:1 (1986) which was devoted to Teaching Buddhism in the Secondary School.

¹⁵ HMSO, Education Reform Act. London: HMSO. (1988) Section 8.3..

¹⁶ TERENCE COPLEY *Teaching Religion: Fifty Years of Religious Education*, Exeter (1997) p.188.

¹⁷ SCAA Model 1: *Living Faiths Today*. London: SCAA (1994); SCAA Model 2: *Questions and Teachings*. London: SCAA (1994)

¹⁸ QCA *Religious Education: The Non-Statutory National Framework*. London: QCA (2004) p 12.

Society, Clear Vision Trust and the NBO are member organisations of the RE Council; interestingly, all are predominantly ‘convert’ organisations.

RE teaching materials and Agreed Syllabuses for Buddhism, as for other religions, have a tendency to present images of religion that are tidier and less diverse than they are in reality.²⁰ From the mid-1980s to the 1990s, when the first curriculum materials on Buddhism were being written, convert Buddhists formed the majority of the demographic²¹ with a consequent tendency for curriculum materials to portray Buddhism in terms attractive to westerners²² but overlooking the ‘perpetuating structures’ of Buddhism often prioritised more highly by the heritage Buddhist community.²³ More recent Buddhist RE teaching materials, by the Clearvision Trust and others, have sought to redress the heritage-convert balance. The process of depicting Buddhism more recognizably to pupils in RE was also undertaken by the Warwick RE Project through an ethnographic process with Buddhist participants described by Judith Everington,²⁴ and eventually producing a Key Stage 1 textbook.²⁵ In another example, a Sri Lankan Buddhist family, including their children, were interviewed and the edited transcript included as an extended reading resource for GCSE students.²⁶

Research on Buddhism in British RE has focussed largely on how Buddhism is presented in the classroom and the religious home lives of Buddhist pupils. Research with 13- to 14-year-old pupils on Buddhism in the classroom indicated the likelihood that Buddhism *would* be presented as part of their RE, but the degree of inclusion was variable.²⁷ Backus and Cush have described difficulties that prevent more widespread teaching of Buddhism in the RE curriculum.²⁸ The extent to which a convert Buddhist organization promoted convert-centric perspectives in its interaction with schools has been researched.²⁹ With 68% agreement that RE should be taught in school, Buddhist adolescents were found significantly more positive in their attitude to RE than non-Buddhists.³⁰ In contrast, Buddhist attitudes to Collective Worship (CW) were found less positive than for classroom-taught RE; theistic language in

¹⁹ Thanks to Dr Joyce Miller of the REC and Patrick Hampshire of NASACRE for providing up to date Buddhist representation data at short notice.

²⁰ LYNNE REVELL 'Religious Education in England' in Numen, 2008. LV:2-3: p. 218-240.

²¹ JO BACKUS & DENISE CUSH 'Buddhism within the English State School System' in MAHINDA DEEGALLE (ed) Dharma to the UK: A Centennial Celebration of Buddhist Legacy, London (2008) pp 231-46 and HELEN WATERHOUSE 'Representing western Buddhism: a UK focus' in GWILYM BECKERLEGG (ed) From Sacred Text to Internet. Milton Keynes (2001) p 117-60

²² BACKUS & CUSH, op. cit., pp 231-46.

²³ PHILIP MELLOR The Cultural Translation of Buddhism: Problems of Theory and Method Arising in the Study of Buddhism in England. PhD Dissertation: University of Manchester (1989).

HELEN WATERHOUSE 'Who Says So? Legitimacy and Authenticity in British Buddhism' in Scottish Journal of Religious Studies, 20:1 (1999) pp 19-36.

²⁴ JUDITH EVERINGTON 'A Question of Authenticity: The Relationship between Educators and Practitioners in the Representation of Religious Traditions' in BJRE 18:2 (1996) pp 69-77.

²⁵ MARGARET BARRATT The Buddha's Birthday. Oxford (1994).

²⁶ DENISE CUSH Buddhists in Britain Today. Norwich (1990).

²⁷ WILLIAM KAY & D LINNET SMITH Classroom Factors and Attitude towards Six World Religions' in BJRE 24:2 (2002) pp 111-22 and PHRA NICHOLAS THANISSARO RE and Attitudes to Buddhism & Sikhism. MA Dissertation: University of Warwick (2010). [DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.1688.8169] pp.52-53.

²⁸ BACKUS & CUSH, op. cit..

²⁹ MARK JONES An evaluation of the extent to which a Friends of the Western Buddhist Order Centre promotes a FWBO-centric strand of Buddhism, or contributes towards an understanding of Buddhist diversity, through educational visits. MA Dissertation: University of Warwick (2010).

³⁰ THANISSARO (2015) op. cit. p.378.

CW may detract from an otherwise positive Buddhist attitude towards RE. Preliminary qualitative research also suggested dissonance between educational theory and home practice may apply to Buddhism.³¹

Research on the religious home background of Buddhist pupils has included the study of a Buddhist temple in Britain as part of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit's ethnography³² and ethnographic studies have also been made of the Cambodian³³ and Vietnamese³⁴ Buddhist communities in Britain.

Generally in education, Buddhists are enthusiastic learners. Despite there being education in Buddhist temples, including well-organized Sunday schools (especially the *daham pasala* at Srilankan temples), religious sanctity is attached traditionally even to the process of public education for *secular* subjects. The earliest Buddhist scriptures advocate respect for education [*sikkhāgāra*] and characterize education as a gift from the teacher [*vidhayadāna*], encouraging teachers to be held in respect (and sometimes awe). Such values have been transmitted down to the present day as traditions such as Vietnamese Buddhist love of learning [*tánh hiếu học*]. Teaching, especially of RE, is thus a Right Livelihood profession welcoming of Buddhist men and women – with Buddhists having much to offer as a committed but neutral facilitators in matters of inter-religious dialogue.³⁵

Recommendations more specific to the teaching of Buddhism in RE, derived from some of the research described above include the importance of representing Buddhism in the classroom in a way which prioritises *practice* rather than 'beliefs' and 'scripture'. The tendency to regard Buddhism as a glorified form of spirituality or New Age practice should be avoided. Teachers should also respect Buddhists' atheism as an informed choice rather than a lack of faith, since irrespective of denomination, over three-quarters of Buddhists claim *not* to believe in God. Teachers need to familiarize themselves with the informal nurture that goes on in Buddhist home practice and try to couch CW activities in a vocabulary that avoids inadvertent reliance on theistic vocabulary to convey religious values.

Phra Nicholas Thanissaro was awarded doctoral status by the University of Warwick's Centre for Education Studies on the strength of a PhD dissertation entitled 'Templegoing Teens: the Religiosity and Identity of Buddhists growing up in Britain'. A Buddhist monk affiliated with the Dhammakāya Foundation (a revivalist Buddhist organization in the Thai Theravāda Buddhist tradition), he holds a Master's degree in Religious Education from the University of Warwick and a Postgraduate Certificate of Education from Manchester Metropolitan University.

³¹ PHRA NICHOLAS THANISSARO A preliminary assessment of Buddhism's contextualisation to the English R.E. classroom. BJRE 33:1 (2011) pp 61-74.

³² MILLER op. cit..

³³ LAURA HODGES The Role of Religion in Migration: An Ethnographic Study of the Cambodian Community in the UK. MA Dissertation: King's College London (2010).

³⁴ JUDITH LAW The religious beliefs and practices of the Vietnamese community in Britain. Community Religions Project Research Papers [NS] No.9, Leeds: University of Leeds (1991).

³⁵ MASAO ABE Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue. Hawaii (1995).