

## **Religious Education Journals on Two Sides of the Atlantic—Are We Alike or Different?**

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*Abstract: A comparison is made of the contents and contributors to the British Journal of Religious Education (UK) and Religious Education (North America). The content analysis of each journal on which this article is based, was conducted for a 10-year period between 1992-2002. A total of 20 volumes were analyzed, with attention given to types of research published, composition of review boards, authors' gender, affiliation, religious identity, position, geographic location, and number of contributions. The question of what each journal can learn from the other is addressed, and implications for the field are drawn.*

The state of the refereed journals in a field is frequently indicative of the status of the research in that field. In this article we address the condition of the research in religious education in the UK and in North America by comparing their two most significant journals, *Religious Education* (RE) and the *British Journal of Religious Education* (BJRE). We have assessed each journal for a 10 year period and now contrast them on the basis of a number of items: types of research published, composition of review boards, authors' gender, affiliation, religious identity, position, geographic location, and number of contributions (for results of our review of RE see English, D'Souza, & Chartrand, in press; for BJRE see English et al., 2003). The question of what each journal can learn from the other is addressed, and implications for the field are drawn.

There are a considerable number of limitations to this analysis. One is that we chose only a 10 year period when indeed each journal is much older; *Religious Education* was first published in 1906 and the *British Journal of Religious Education* began as *Religion in Education* in 1934. Second, we realize that BJRE is focused primarily on school based religious education, and that RE is intended to include research on a wider variety of venues, including religious education in houses of worship and in the community. In the absence of a closer match of journals, we have chosen to compare these two in terms they hold in common.

### **Background Information on Each Journal**

*The British Journal of Religious Education* incorporates the earlier journals *Religion in Education* (1934-1961) and *Learning for Living* (1961-1978). For 25 years, 1971-1996, Volume 10 (4) of *Learning for Living* until Volume 18 (3) of BJRE, the editor was the distinguished professor of religious education, John Hull from the University of Birmingham (see Bates, 2002, p. 9). The editorship was assumed by Professor Robert Jackson (Warwick University) with Volume 19 (1) in 1996. Therefore, during the 10-year period which this research covers, Drs. John Hull and Robert Jackson were editors.

The BJRE is published by Christian Education (formerly the Christian Education Movement) in Britain, an ecumenical education charity which works throughout the UK. The aims of Christian Education are “to support religious and moral education in schools, to increase awareness of the often unstated beliefs and values by which people live, and to articulate Christian perspectives in education” (see inside cover of BJRE). The BJRE is informally linked with the Professional Council for Religious Education, the main professional body for teachers of religious education in England and Wales. BJRE also has informal links with the membership of the Association of University Lecturers in Religions and Education (AULRE, previously known as CULRE). The focus of BJRE is scholarship and research relating to school level religious education, with an emphasis on religious education as understood in the UK publicly funded school sector (i.e., religious education as education rather than nurture or formation) (personal correspondence with Robert Jackson).

The BJRE is published three times per year, with a current average of 4-5 articles appearing in every issue. The submitted article goes through an anonymous review process and is read by two independent referees who write detailed reports for the editors. If referees disagree, a third referee is consulted. The official records/statistics on the Journal, which were first tabulated in 1998, show that the BJRE has about a 50% rejection rate (personal communication with Robert Jackson).

The review board of the BJRE is comprised of a number of individuals who are chosen solely for their academic ability as scholars and researchers in the field of religious education (or related fields). Referees can be from any religious background or none, and they have a wide variety of personal views. Most are UK academics, but international referees are consulted very regularly, especially with regard to contributions from abroad (personal communication with R. Jackson).

*Religious Education*, which was first published in 1906, has had a range of editors including Henry F. Cope, Frank G. Ward, Clifford Manshardt, Laird T. Hites, Joseph Artman, Leonard Stidley, Paul H. Vieth, John Westerhoff III, Jack D. Spiro, and Randolph Crump Miller (longest serving editor, term from 1958-1978). During the 10-year period that this paper covers, Hanan Alexander (then of University of Judaism, Los Angeles, CA) was editor for volumes 88 (1) up until Theodore Brelsford (Emory University, Atlanta) became editor in 96 (1). RE is sponsored by the Religious Education Association (REA) and the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education (APRRE), both North American ecumenical and interfaith bodies.

RE has a policy of having all papers reviewed by at least two external anonymous reviewers before the paper is accepted (personal communication with T. Brelsford). The review board of the journal is selected by the editor and is representative of denominational and religious traditions, as well as academic and research strengths. During the 10 year period under review, the Journal, with few exceptions (in volume 90, issues 3 and 4 were combined), published 4 times per year, with one issue per year being devoted to selected conference papers. Each of the 39 issues had a theme title (for 3 of the 4 issues, the theme was identified by editor), and the conference theme was used for the issue that contained conference papers (the theme was

selected by APRRE's president). This pre-identification of themes makes it difficult to analyze or identify main themes in the research, since the titles and topics often follow the suggestions given, yet some effort was made to do this.

### **Methods for the Research**

The usual procedure for conducting a content analysis is to follow the methods used in previous content analyses of that journal. The new results can then be compared with prior results to identify trends and changes. However, we were unable to identify any previous studies of either RE or BJRE. For that reason we chose to devise our own schema or categories of analysis. A graduate student was employed to collect and analyze data.

We narrowed our journal choice to BJRE and RE for several reasons. To begin with, these journals are both ecumenical and interfaith (not single denomination or religion), anonymous peer-reviewed (not editor-reviewed only), and intended to be a vehicle for publishing religious education research only (as distinct from journals that include religious education, theology, and pastoral concerns, or some combination thereof). We were unable to identify other journals in North America or the United Kingdom (or Europe) that met these criteria. We did not include book reviews in our analysis, although BJRE and RE publish reviews.

A content analysis of the *British Journal of Religious Education* was conducted for a 10-year period between 1992-2002 (Volume 15, 1—Volume 25, 1). A total of 156 articles (131 authors) were analyzed. A similar analysis was done for *Religious Education: An Interfaith Journal of Spirituality, Growth and Transformation*, for a 10-year period between 1993-2002 (Volume 88, 1—Volume 97, 4). For RE, a total of 325 articles (277 authors) were analyzed. For each journal we wanted to consider the distribution of collaborative work among contributing authors as well as distributions of multiple contributions by authors and institutions to both journals. This was important in order to identify the frequency of contributions by authors and institutions to both journals in what we consider to be cross-fertilization of ideas. This cross-fertilization was also measured in terms of a comparison of the geographical distribution of primary authors contributing to both journals. For further analysis of authors, besides geographical region and institutional affiliation, gender distribution and professional titles of the authors we also compiled. In terms of article content, we recorded the educational subject addressed (age of audience to which the article was directed), religious emphasis, and educational topic (e.g., policy and administration, history, spirituality) and the type of research method presented in the article. Research methods were categorized into 3 primary directions: theoretical, qualitative and quantitative.

## **Results**

### **Collaborative Focus**

Collaborative work is at the cutting edge of academic scholarship; group research and writing are a bona fide way to increase learning and publication, and to contribute to all of our professional development. Boud (1999) argues that the establishment of research groups increases competence, productivity, and enthusiasm in a faculty, as well as the likelihood of success in grant applications. Table 1 shows the rate of collaboration in publication for both BJRE and RE. It is striking that the rates are similar, with RE having 90.5% single authored papers, and the

BJRE having 80.1%. Neither of these statistics is encouraging, suggesting that the journals consider ways that they can encourage collaborative work, either through a call for papers for a special issue with collaborative work or the announcement of a conference around the issue of collaboration in research and publication. As well, we wonder if the leaders whom we educate for work in religious institutions and schools can be expected to have a collaborative focus if those who teach them work alone to produce their research for publication.

**Table 1: Comparison of Collaborative Research in Both Journals**

	RE		BJRE	
	# Articles	Percent	# Articles	Percent
1 Author	294	90.5%	125	80.1%
2 Authors	23	7.1%	27	17.3%
3 Authors	7	2.2%	2	1.3%
4 Authors	0	0.0%	2	1.3%
5 Authors	1	0.3%	0	0.0%
Total Articles	<b>325</b>	100.0%	<b>156</b>	100.0%

### Cross-Fertilization of Ideas

The degree to which a field is open to external ideas or influences can be construed as indicative of the health of the field. Are we insular or do we invite commentary from others? In order to determine the amount of overlap between journals or the degree to which UK and North American researchers published in each other's journals, we compared institutions and authors in each journal. The analysis, shown in Table 2, is not encouraging. Of the 405 different authors contributing to 481 articles in 20 volumes of RE and BJRE over the 10- year period analyzed, only 41 authors contributed to at least three articles in either RE, BJRE or both. Table 2 shows that 13 (32%) of the 41 multiple contributing authors had at least one contribution to both journals. And of those 13 authors who contributed at least 3 articles to a combination of both journals over the past 10 years, only 5 authors contributed at least 2 articles to both journals. Of the 5 authors contributing at least 2 articles, Leslie Francis contributed 4 articles to RE and 8 to BJRE for a total of 12 contributions in 10 years. Clive Erricker published 2 articles in RE and 3 in BJRE while Kate Siejik contributed 3 to RE and 2 to BJRE. Heinz Streib contributed 2 articles to each of the journals for a total of 4 contributions.

**Table 2: Comparison of Top Contributing Authors**

(Includes Primary and Collaborative Authorship)

Number of Articles			Author Name
RE	BJRE	Both	
4	8	12	Francis, Leslie J
0	6	6	Kay, William K
2	3	5	Erricker, Clive
5	0	5	Wenh-In Ng, Greer Anne
3	2	5	Siejik, Kate
0	4	4	Smith, D Linnet
0	4	4	Nesbitt, Eleanor

2	2	4	Streib, Heinz
4	0	4	Seymour, Jack
1	3	4	Astley, Jeff
2	2	4	Hull, John M
3	1	4	Mullino Moore, Mary Elizabeth
4	0	4	Cram, Ronald H
3	1	4	Miedema, Siebren
0	4	4	Copley, Terrence
3	0	3	Proffitt, Anabel
1	2	3	Wright, Andrew
3	0	3	Streaty Wimberly, Anne
3	0	3	Roebben, Bert
3	0	3	Ingall, Carol K
0	3	3	Cush, Denise
3	0	3	Breaux Veverka, Fayette
0	3	3	Gibson, Harry M
0	3	3	Reich, Helmut
3	0	3	Yob, Iris M
0	3	3	Lahnemann, Johannes
0	3	3	Everington, Judith
2	1	3	Barnes, L Philip
3	0	3	English, Leona
3	0	3	Crain, Margaret Ann
3	0	3	Boys, Mary C
3	0	3	Hess, Mary E
3	0	3	O'Brien, Maureen
1	2	3	Jackson, Robert
0	3	3	Homan, Roger
3	0	3	Feiman-Nemser, Sharon
2	1	3	Lovat, Terrence J
3	0	3	Brelsford, Theodore
3	0	3	Smith, W Alan
1	2	3	Meijer, Wilna A J
3	0	3	Whelan, Winifred

### Contributions by Institution

The academic culture of some institutions is more open and inclusive than others. Related to the cross-fertilization of ideas are the institutions that the authors represent. In terms of ranked contributions from institutions based on the primary author's affiliation (Table 3), of the 25 institutions that contributed at least 4 articles to both RE and BJRE over the 10-year period, 11 institutions contributed at least 1 article to both journals. Of these 11 institutions, only 4 contributed at more than one article to both institutions. Most notable examples of institutions that support both journals are the Australian Catholic University (4 articles in RE and 6 in BJRE, for a total of 10 articles), the University of Birmingham (2 articles in RE and 4 article in BJRE), the University of Wales (3 articles in RE and 2 in BJRE), and the University of Ulster (2 articles in each of RE and BJRE). Of the top 8 contributing institutions, 5 contributed to both journals.

**Table 3: Comparison of Top Contributing Institutions**  
(Institutions based on Primary Author's Affiliation)

Number of Articles			Institution Affiliation of Primary Author
RE	BJRE	Both	
1	10	11	University of Warwick
4	6	10	Australian Catholic University
10	0	10	Boston College
8	1	9	Claremont School of Theology
7	1	8	Bar Ilan University
8	0	8	Emory University
1	7	8	Trinity College, Carmarthenshire
8	0	8	Union Theological Seminary
2	4	6	University of Birmingham
5	0	5	Duke Divinity School
5	0	5	Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology
5	0	5	Gonzaga University
5	0	5	Hebrew Union College
5	0	5	Lancaster Theological Seminary
3	2	5	University of Wales
4	0	4	Fordham University
3	1	4	Jewish Theological Seminary of America
1	3	4	King's College, University of London
4	0	4	Loyola University Chicago
0	4	4	University of Erlangen-Nurnberg
0	4	4	University of Exeter
4	0	4	University of St. Michael's College
1	3	4	University of Tubingen
2	2	4	University of Ulster
4	0	4	Villanova University

### Geographical Influence

Linked to the above cross-fertilization of ideas by author and institution is the geographical location that the authors represent. Table 4 shows that there is little similarity between the two journals in terms of author location. Only 4 of the 156 authors (2.6%) published in the BJRE were from North America; only 27 of the 325 authors (8.3%) published in RE were from Europe. This may be due to a lack of familiarity with the other journal, seeming difference in topics published in each, lack of interest in exploring publishing routes outside one's own association, or even perceived differences in publishing expectations of each journal. Whatever the reason, Table 4 demonstrates a lack of continental crossover in terms of author.

**Table 4: Comparison of Geographical Regions for Primary Authors**

Region	RE		BJRE	
	# Authors	Percent	# Authors	Percent
North America				
US	250	76.9%	2	1.3%
Canada	18	5.5%	2	1.3%
Europe				
UK	16	4.9%	100	64.1%
Not UK	11	3.4%	33	21.2%
Australia	7	2.2%	9	5.8%
Other	20	6.2%	9	5.8%
Unspecified	3	0.9%	1	0.6%
Total Articles	<b>325</b>	100.0%	<b>156</b>	100.0%

### Gender of Primary Authors

As Table 5 shows, both journals have different gender distributions for primary authors. Whereas RE has a split of 40.9% female/ 56.6% male contributors as primary authors, the BJRE has a split of 24.4% female to 75.6% male. Even when we account for all authors (primary and other), there is no significant difference in gender contributions (within +/3%). When one considers that the corresponding academic organizations for each journal have a more even male/female ratio of members, neither journal can be said to be doing well in soliciting manuscripts from females, although RE is marginally better. APRRE, for instance, has 130 men and 159 women (plus 15 whose sex is unknown) (correspondence with Randy Litchfield, membership secretary, March, 2003). CULRE has 47 men (42%) and 65 females (58%). (correspondence from Ciro Genovese, membership secretary, March, 2003). Although figures for the new AULRE, which replaces CULRE, were not available at time of writing but we expect there is a similar breakdown.

**Table 5: Comparative Gender Distribution for Primary Authors and All Authors**

Percent of Articles (Number of Articles)

Gender	Primary Authors		All Authors	
	RE	BJRE	RE	BJRE
Female	40.9% (133)	24.4% (38)	40.8% (148)	27.9% (48)
Male	56.6% (184)	75.6% (118)	57.3% (208)	72.1% (124)
n/a	2.5% (8)	0.6% (1)	1.9% (7)	0% (0)
Totals	100% (325)	100% (156)	100% (363)	100% (172)

### Professional Status of Primary Authors

Table 8 shows the professional status of primary authors. Both journals publish a predominant amount of research from faculty (86.5% for RE and 88.5% from BJRE). In the case of RE, the number of contributions from pastors and practitioners is incredibly low. In contrast, cognate areas in education pride themselves on having students and practitioners publish in their journals. In the premier journal in adult education, *Adult Education Quarterly*, for instance, 46% of the articles published between 1969-1988 were written by graduate students (Blunt & Lee, 1994).

**Table 8: Comparative Distribution of Primary Authors' Professional Titles**

Title	RE		BJRE	
	# Authors	Percent	# Authors	Percent
Faculty				
<i>Prof/Prof Emeritus</i>	67	20.6%	19	12.2%
<i>Assoc Prof</i>	62	19.1%	10	6.4%
<i>Senior Lecturer</i>	4	1.2%	23	14.7%
<i>Asst Prof</i>	62	19.1%	0	0.0%
<i>Instructor</i>	15	4.6%	27	17.3%
<i>Lecturer</i>	15	4.6%	3	1.9%
<i>Researcher</i>	4	1.2%	10	6.4%
<i>Faculty Other</i>	52	16.0%	46	29.5%
Pastor	11	3.4%	6	3.8%
Student	16	4.9%	6	3.8%
Non-Faculty Other	17	5.2%	6	3.8%
Total Primary Authors	325	100.0%	156	100.0%

BJRE publishes more work from senior academics than RE does. BJRE's contributors include professors (12.2%) and senior lecturers (14.7%). RE's senior contributors include professors and professor emeriti (20.6%) and senior lecturers (1.2%). These results speak well for the attitude of senior academics in the UK: they continue to subject their work to anonymous peer review. The results challenge senior academics in North America to increase contributions to refereed publications.

### Educational Level Focus

Common to both journals is a practice of clearly directing their writing and research to those involved in primary and secondary schooling (RE 23.7%; BJRE 67.9%). Yet, there are equally large numbers of articles in which the research group or focus is not specified or make clear. For RE, 165 of the 325 articles did not specify the educational focus of the research in the text, and for BJRE, 38 of the 156 articles did not specify the focus. This lack of research specificity may be accounted for by the fact that many of the articles in each journal are theoretical and do not have a specific audience in mind (see Table 7).

**Table 6: Comparative Distribution of Educational Audience**

Subject	RE		BJRE	
	# Articles	Percent	# Articles	Percent
Schooling	77	23.7%	106	67.9%
University	20	6.2%	6	3.8%
Graduate	24	7.4%	2	1.3%
Adult	35	10.8%	4	2.6%
Unspecific	165	50.8%	38	24.4%
other (fem)	4	1.2%	0	0.0%
Total Articles	<b>325</b>	100.0%	<b>156</b>	100.0%

## Types of Research

The general research thrust in educational research is qualitative. Yet, as seen in Table 7, contributors to RE and BJRE do not follow this established trend. Only 4.9% of articles in RE and 7.6% of those in BJRE, for the 10-year period under study, were based on qualitative research. Neither journal is doing well in this regard. While the amount of quantitative work is considerable in BJRE (38%), it is modest in RE (8%). This raises concerns about the state of religious education when so little field research is being done, and a large percentage of articles published by the two leading journals deals with theory.

**Table 7: Comparative Distribution of Type of Research Emphasis**

Type	RE		BJRE	
	# Articles	Percent	# Articles	Percent
Theory	283	87.1%	85	54.5%
Qualitative	16	4.9%	12	7.7%
Quantitative	26	8.0%	59	37.8%
Total Articles	325	100.0%	156	100.0%

## Primary Religious Audience of the Article

Given the particularities of Christian traditions, the religious histories of RE and BJRE, and the lack of unity among Christian traditions and between religious groups, Table 9 is very interesting. This table shows the primary religious audience intended by the author, insofar as the researchers can determine. The results are somewhat mixed. Given that RE is intended to include research on religious education in parishes and houses of worship, among other places, it is interesting that this journal does not have more articles directed to specific religious groups. In fact, there are many articles in this journal that are considered to be “generally Christian,” but the specific Christian group or audience is not clearly articulated. Because of this lack of articulation, it is important to note that the categories “Protestant” and “Unspecified” are both inflated due to the inclusion of articles that were either very general in terms of “Christian” terminology. One wonders if this is because the author is unclear, if he or she is attempting to be general, or if he or she sees this as irrelevant. One wonders then why RE has a review board that is representative of different traditions and denominations.

**Table 9: Comparative Distribution of Primary Religious Emphasis of Articles**

Religion	RE		BJRE	
	# Articles	Percent	# Articles	Percent
Catholic	38	11.7%	16	10.3%
Protestant	167	51.4%	71	45.5%
Jewish	41	12.6%	2	1.3%
Muslim	2	0.6%	8	5.1%
Hindu	0	0.0%	1	0.6%
Buddhist	1	0.3%	0	0.0%
Inter-religious	31	9.5%	11	7.1%
Other	7	2.2%	6	3.8%
Unspecific	38	11.7%	41	26.3%
Total Articles	325	100.0%	156	100.0%

## Themes and Issues

Using the themes indicated as important to one of the journals, RE (see Guidelines for Contributors), an attempt was made to classify the articles in both journals. (No such list is available for BJRE). The categories and corresponding emphases are given in Table 10. Both journals appear to have similarly large percentages of articles covering Educational Theory, Models and Methods, and Spiritual, Cultural and Social Issues. However, BJRE has a greater percentage of articles (20.5%) addressing religious education policy and administration in comparison to RE (1.2%). This is explainable given the national agenda for religious education in the UK and the corresponding reports, policies, and curriculum materials that the researchers have to work with and respond to. On the other hand, RE has a greater percentage of articles (23.4%) dealing with specific religious traditions and history of religious education as opposed to BJRE (7.7%). This is also explainable in terms of the history of religious education in North America as being connected to religious traditions, and as emphasizing the theological basis for its development.

**Table 10: Comparative Distribution of Articles by Topic**

Topic	RE		BJRE	
	# Articles	Percent	# Articles	Percent
Educational Theory	51	15.7%	18	11.5%
Models & Methods	90	27.7%	39	25.0%
Moral, Value, Char Education	11	3.4%	4	2.6%
Policy & Administration	4	1.2%	32	20.5%
Spiritual, Cultural, Social Issues				
<i>Article without "spirituality" in titles</i>	72	22.2%	45	28.8%
<i>Articles with "spirituality" in title</i>	15	4.6%	6	3.8%
Sacred Texts, Scripture	6	1.8%	0	0.0%
Tradition/History	76	23.4%	12	7.7%
Total Articles	<b>325</b>	100.0%	<b>156</b>	100.0%

## Discussion

Both these journals have served their constituencies well, if the duration of publication and the reputation of each journal is considered. Yet, this study has shown that there are many issues that need to be considered by the editors and the review boards. Some of these have been named above: low rate of collaborative work; little crossover between journals in terms of authors and institutions; lack of gender parity, especially in BJRE; low incidence of senior academics AND graduate students contributing, especially in RE; low rate of field research, especially qualitative research; lack of specificity in terms of education and religious audience. Based on these findings we would like to make some suggestions to the editors and review boards.

That the journals work toward gender equity in terms of selection of the editor, review board members, and authors. This could be done through a call for editorship proposals when the editorship becomes vacant, and through a call for reviewers when positions become vacant, as well as through special issues of the journals.

That these journals, RE and BJRE, begin to dialogue with each other and to work on increasing contributions from international sources. This might take the form of a call for papers for special

international issues or even soliciting guest editors for particular issues. They might also learn from each other's strengths; for instance, the principles of selection for the review board of BJRE, or the stronger gender representation of authors in RE.

That the editors attempt to move the journals toward a stronger research focus. This might be done by changing the Guidelines for Contributors so that a preference for research articles is stated, and that the authors be asked to clearly identify, if at all possible, the audience, educational level, the research methods (history, philosophy, quantitative, qualitative, etc.), research process and sources of information (archival, interviews, etc), findings, and the contributions to scholarship. The editors might also ask authors to identify key words for their article.

We realize that the work being done on these journals is voluntary and an act of considerable service to our profession. We acknowledge the foresight of the founders, the strong record achievement attributable to a long line of distinguished editors in North America and the UK, and to the enduring care of the present administrations. All comments in this article are intended to build on the pedigree of each of *Religious Education* and *British Journal of Religious Education*.

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