

Studying prayer: knowledge and methods

Kinds of knowledge

This book distinguishes between ‘substantive’ knowledge and ‘disciplinary’ knowledge. These terms are increasingly present in educational discourse, although they are not consistently applied. In these books they are used in the following ways:

Substantive knowledge concerns the subject content being studied, in terms of the core concepts, truth claims, teachings and practices of traditions (mainly religious, but it applies to non-religious worldviews too), and the behaviour and responses of adherents within traditions. NB boundaries may be blurred and much of this knowledge is contested.

Disciplinary knowledge concerns the methods by which the substantive knowledge is reached. The 2021 Ofsted Research Review suggests a broader category, **ways of knowing**. This might be as simple as helping students to identify that there is a difference between, say, Genesis chapter 1 and the British Social Attitudes Survey: the source, origin and status of both are different (and differ in various contexts) and they need to be handled differently in the classroom. This book, however, focuses on applying academic disciplines as a clear example of ways of knowing. For example, this book uses religious studies approaches to compare prayer across three traditions; it uses sociological data to analyse the extent, purpose and impact of prayer, and applies an analytic tool from psychology to test the idea of prayer as connection ‘inward, outward, upward’.

The Ofsted RE Research Review 2021 also includes **personal knowledge**. This might be about helping students become more aware of their own assumptions and presuppositions, and how these affect their encounters with the content of RE. It will be clear that these three kinds of knowledge (substantive, disciplinary and personal) are reflected in our teaching and learning approach.

This approach has been influenced by the work of Rob Freathy and colleagues.¹ Rob Freathy’s summary suggests a three-strand approach, where RE explores the **object of study**, the **methods of study** and the **subject (the student)**.

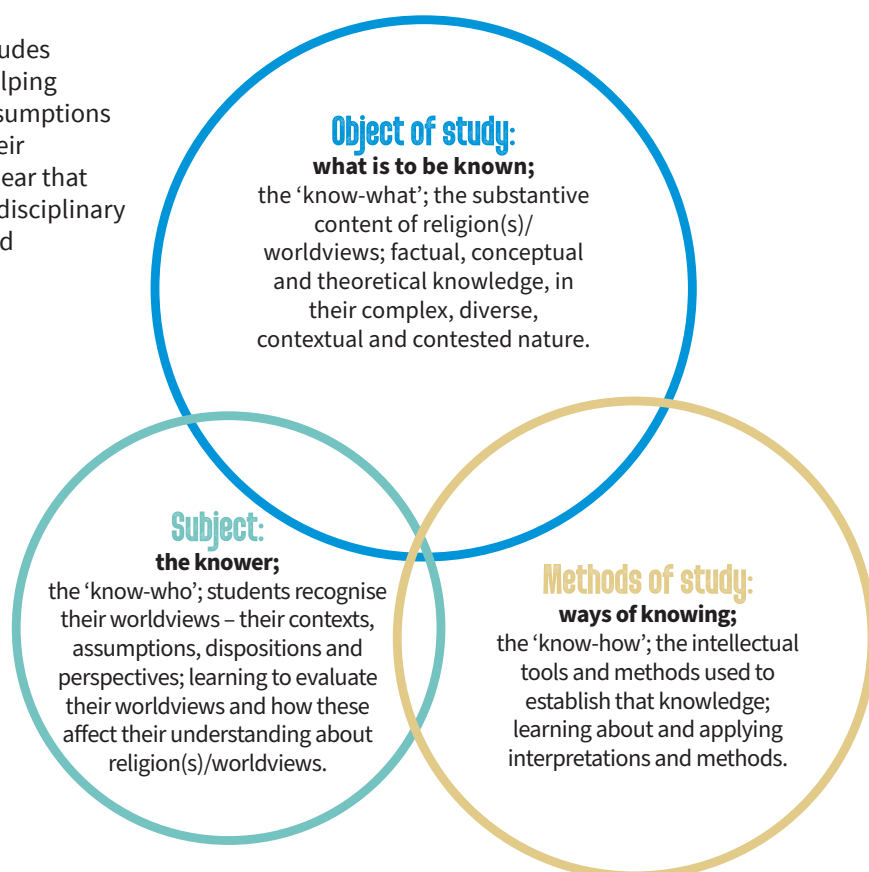
These three strands can be discerned behind the approaches that follow in this series.

Teaching and learning approach

As with the other books in this series, the resources in *Studying Prayer* seek to enable teachers and students to look *through* a range of disciplinary lenses at the substantive content of religious and non-religious worldviews, and also to look at these disciplinary lenses or methods. A third purpose is to open students’ eyes to the lenses that they are already wearing as they look at the world – to recognise that they encounter the content of RE from within their own perspectives (or ‘worldviews’), and to become aware of how that shapes their own responses and understanding.

If you have been using the other books in this series you will be familiar with this diagram, although we have adjusted it since the first volumes. This is to indicate that in the classroom reality, much time will need to be spent on substantive content – the object of study. The selected discipline(s) guide the approach – the questions, the methods, the evaluative skills applied – as you explore the substantive content. (Of course, as you use the different disciplinary methods over time, students will become more used to applying them, so less time will be taken up in setting up the disciplinary approaches.)

At any point in the process, you may draw attention to students’ awareness of their own position in relation to the content being studied, and there may be particular opportunities towards the end of a unit to focus on how and why students’ perspectives may have altered.



1 e.g. Rob Freathy & Helen C. John (2018), ‘Religious education, big ideas and the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)’, *British Journal of Religious Education*, and Rob Freathy and Helen C. John (2019), ‘Worldviews and big ideas: a way forward for religious education?’ *Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education*.