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What is reflexivity? A scoping review of reflexivity and related concepts in Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

Reflexivity has become a key concept in RE. It plays a vital role in the interpretive approach and the broader contexts of hermeneutics, anthropology, and research methodology. Moreover, reflexivity is closely related to other terms like self-awareness and self-reflection. How can we conceptualise reflexivity and these related concepts? What are the possible purposes of reflexivity in RE, and how is it facilitated? To answer these questions, we have conducted a thorough scoping review of 62 peer-reviewed articles in English. We identified literature from a broad range of contexts through a comprehensive search. The result is a nuanced classification of the conceptualisations, purposes, and practices we identified in a rich and highly heterogeneous body of literature. We have made this result available in Supplementary material to support future research. Our mapping indicates the need for conceptual clarity and consistent use of reflexivity and related concepts.

KEYWORDS


Reflexivity; religious education; scoping review; self-awareness; self-reflection

Introduction

Reflexivity is a widely used term in academic research, most typically understood as an activity where a researcher accounts for their positionality and how this might impact the research (Serra Undurruga 2021), particularly in the context of ethnography (Davies 1998). It also features in sociological research to describe a particular condition or feature of late modern life and individuality (Archer 2010, 2012). In religious education (RE), however, reflexivity has taken on other meanings and, together with other closely related terms like self-reflection, is central to many discussions and practices in the field. Crucially, it plays a key role in the influential interpretive approach by Robert Jackson (1997, 2008), who was deeply influenced by anthropological writings on reflexivity (e.g. 1997, 46). In his framework, reflexivity famously encapsulates edification,¹ that is, pupils reconsidering their own way of life, although his definition of reflexivity also includes constructive critique and reviewing methods of study (Jackson 2008, 172).

Reflexivity is also used in several other aspects of RE. In RE teacher education, some scholars have linked reflexivity to teacher professionalism and the value of reflecting on one's own background and its potential impact on practice (e.g. Berglund 2014; Flanagan 2021b). Others have tied reflexivity to self-assessment (Fancourt 2010) or boys questioning gender norms as part of RE (Farrell 2015). In Martha Shaw's proposed framework for *Worldview literacy*, reflexivity appears as a key term associated with self-reflection and positionality (Shaw 2020, 2023).

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These examples show that reflexivity is sometimes used synonymously or in connection with other related terms like self-reflection, self-awareness,² introspection, and metacognition. To capture how our field has grappled with reflexivity and similar notions of self-reflection, we refer to reflexivity and these related concepts as 'R+'. Thus, R+ stands for a cluster of terms closely tied to reflexivity, which encompasses some notion of self-reflection (Table 1 below).

R+ plays a vital role in RE research and practice. Still, there has not been a systematic investigation of how reflexivity and related concepts have been dealt with in the research literature. To provide this overview, we have done a scoping review of 62 peer-reviewed articles with three research

Table 1. The inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in the scoping review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria		
Type of criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of publication	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers Books/book chapters Teaching materials Entries in journals without a stated peer-review process.
Language	English	Any other than English
Publication period	All	
Type of studies	All	
Religious education	Non-confessional RE Confessional RE Religious Studies Courses	Theological education into any confession Proselytising entries Psychology and Therapy Spiritual development education History of ideas Citizenship if missing reference to the religious aspect
Educational setting	Public/private school context Public/private University context	Education in confessional settings like priest seminaries, madrasas, and Jewish schools Missing educational setting
Educational level	All	
Key R+ terms used in abstract	reflexiv* self-reflexiv* self reflect* self aware* self knowledge self examin* introspecti* self-assess* self evaluat* metacognit* reflect* practice reflect* inquir*	
Key educational terms	religio* education worldview education religious literac* worldview literac* teaching religio* teaching about religio* teaching worldview* teaching about worldview* didactics of religio* learning about religio* learning from religio* interfaith teaching interfaith dialogue* interfaith learning multifaith teaching multifaith learning multifaith dialogue*	
Operationalisation of R+	R+ is an essential part of the article	Used methodologically: The author uses reflexivity in their methodology section related to empirical data collection. Missing relation to the study of religion or to RE in school or education

questions (1): How has R+ been conceptualised? (2) What are the suggested purposes of R+? (3) What practices are suggested to facilitate and support R+?

Our overall aim is to contribute to inform knowledge about reflexivity in religious education. To do this, we map different ways reflexivity and related concepts have been understood and discussed and generate nuanced classifications to each research question. This approach is often described as configurative (as opposed to aggregative) (Gough, Thomas, and Oliver 2012, 3–5). Although not common, literature reviews have been published in recent years in our field (e.g. Fancourt 2016; Huth, Brown and Usher 2021; Visser et al. 2023). We have followed the most recent guidance for scoping reviews developed by The Joanna Biggs Institute (JBI). Following their developed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework for a scoping review enables rigour and transparency in all phases of the review process (search, identification, synthesis, and reporting) (Peters et al. 2020). To make the data available and accessible, we provide full access to an Excel spreadsheet (Supplementary material) that includes all the articles in the corpus we have reviewed, allowing readers to organise the literature according to various categories. The Excel spreadsheet is an edited version of our data extraction form and is essential to fully comprehend the article and its contribution.

In the next section, we present the method and review strategy. The results of our review are presented in three main sections, each corresponding to the research questions. In the final section, we summarise and discuss the overall result.

Method

Like Visser et al. (2023), we have conducted a scoping review using a systematic search strategy.³ A scoping review is advised when the aims are to identify a breadth of relevant literature on a topic, in our case, reflexivity, and map key concepts (Munn et al. 2018, 2022). Existing guidance and frameworks for scoping reviews are limited, but a methodology has emerged in response to the increasing interest in this approach (Peters et al. 2020; Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien 2010). Although the scoping methodology is versatile, a recent definition (Munn et al. 2022) and updated framework⁴ (Pollock et al. 2023) originates in the health sciences. Applying this methodology in the field of RE research, mainly oriented towards the humanities, with interpretive and qualitative features, requires some clarifications.

An appealing feature of the scoping methodology was the comprehensive search strategy, which facilitated the identification of relevant research literature on R+ across different national contexts for religious education. The descriptive nature of the scoping review (Pollock et al. 2023, 525) was well suited to our aim of identifying and clarifying the different understandings and usages of R+ in the literature.

Identifying relevant studies

The search was primed through a series of test searches, prompting valuable refinements that, in sum, resulted in a more sensitive search. We gained a sense of the scope and volume of the field and our initial understanding that 'reflexivity' was used synonymously and/or overlapped with other terms was confirmed. Common for all these terms is that they, in one way or another, refer to self-reflection, that is, to direct one's thoughts towards oneself and the way one thinks and acts. To target publications de facto dealing with the same phenomenon, we therefore included several synonyms for reflexivity in the search, resulting in the cluster of words we refer to as R+ (e Table 1). We also clarified ambiguous terms like 'education' and 'religious education' (Table 1).

The publications were mainly identified through structured searches in digital research databases, with additional manual searches in Google Scholar and citation searches. To target publications related to education, the search was conducted in three databases for educational research: Education Source, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Teacher Reference Centre

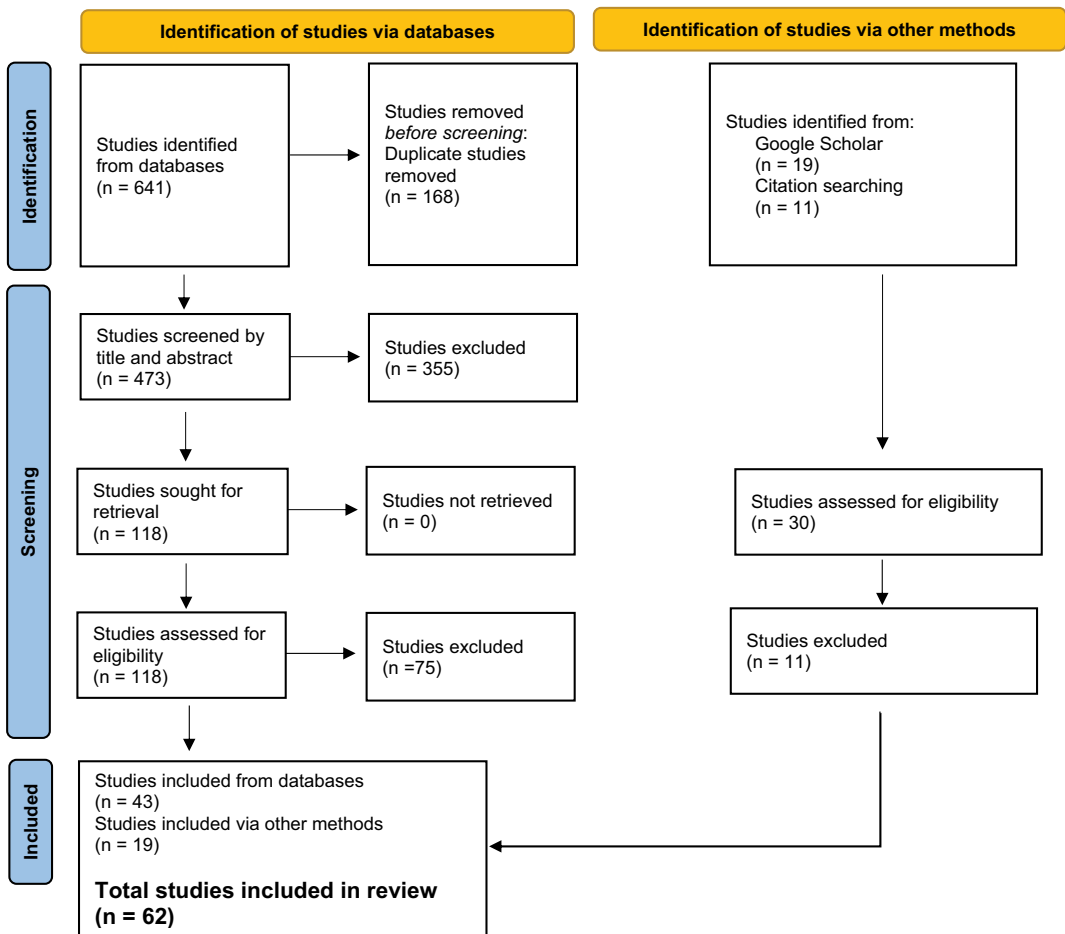


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart of the screening process (model from Page et al. 2021).

(TRC). We included one multidisciplinary database to broaden the scope: Academic Search Ultimate. The databases were accessed through EBSCOhost, and the search was limited to English language and peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure academic quality. The search was conducted in February 2023 and retrieved 641 publications, which was reduced to 473 after removing duplications (Figure 1 below). Our additional search methods (Google Scholar and citation search) resulted in 28 new entries, after which we concluded that the search efforts had reached a point of saturation (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, 24).

Study selection: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The two authors of this article did the screening of the articles based on the listed inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). Only studies that included an R+ term in educational settings were of interest. Given their direct relevance to RE, we included studies in the educational context of religious studies – i.e. students learning about religion. It was not enough that the R+ term was mentioned once or twice to be included. The relevant term had to be sufficiently explained or contextualised.

Of the 473 results from the database search, 355 were excluded based on scanning the titles and abstracts. The remaining 118 articles were read in full text. During the process, the criteria were iteratively refined as we discussed and secured a common interpretation of, for instance, when R+ was sufficiently addressed in an article or when delineating a religious studies context from a practical context of educating religious leaders. By discussion, we agreed to include 62 publications (see Appendix below). [Figure 1](#) provides a PRISMA flow diagram of the identification, screening, and selection process for this review.

Data extraction and analytical approach

The two reviewers extracted the data independently using a shared Excel file (Supplementary material). We recorded information on the characteristics of the article (i.e. author(s), year of publication, country) and characteristics of the study (type of study, which R+ term is used, conceptualisation of R+, theoretical framework, function of R+, specific R+ activities, and reflexive agent). Any disagreements regarding the classifications and the data extraction were resolved by discussion.

According to (Pollock et al. 2023) *basic qualitative content analysis* is appropriate for scoping reviews with qualitative data (525–528). We followed an inductive approach to coding (Pollock et al. 2023, 526–527), as this allowed codes and categories to emerge from the literature. The codes were developed during the screening process and used as a framework when extracting information from the included articles. Through this process, prominent aspects of R+ were identified and organised, and overarching categories for each research question were established.

Limitations

Although our search strategy aims for comprehensive coverage, we do not claim to have retrieved all relevant literature. Firstly, database searches provide access to academic journal articles. However, these might not be updated with the most recent publications, or publications have not yet been appropriately labelled in the databases.⁵ Secondly, it is more time-consuming and complicated to assess which literature is listed in the database and the peer-review process of other types of research, such as books and book chapters. Due to practical constraints, we have included only peer-reviewed journal articles. Targeting all types of sources would only have been possible with more time and resources, as this would have added hundreds of more pages to be considered for inclusion. These strategic choices imply that relevant research published in monographs and anthologies falls outside the scope of this review.⁶

Moreover, all reviews involve making decisions and interpretations (Dixon-Woods et al. 2005, 46), and our mapping relies on our continual and situated understanding of the individual articles and the literature. The results are contextual and ready for re-interpretation.

Results and analysis

Overview of the corpus

The most prevalent R+ term in the corpus is *reflexiv** (27), the primary R+ term used in 27 articles. It is followed by *self-aware** (14) and *self-reflect** (11); the other terms account for the remaining ten articles ([Table 2](#)). We found articles that use one R+ term⁷ (21), two R+ terms (23), three R+ terms (17) and one article that included seven R+ terms (McGuire 2021) ([Table 3](#)).

Are the studies empirical or theoretical? 24 articles are empirical, meaning they have a proper section on methodology or structure their arguments in relation to studies with solid methodological grounding. There are no quantitative studies in the literature. The remaining 35 articles are

Table 2. Frequency of R+ terms used in the literature.

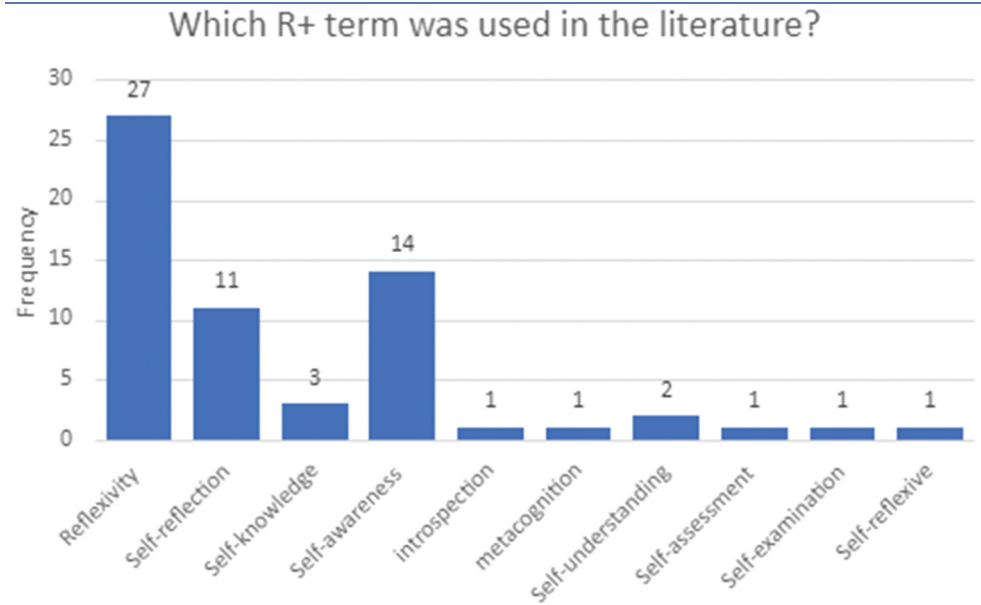
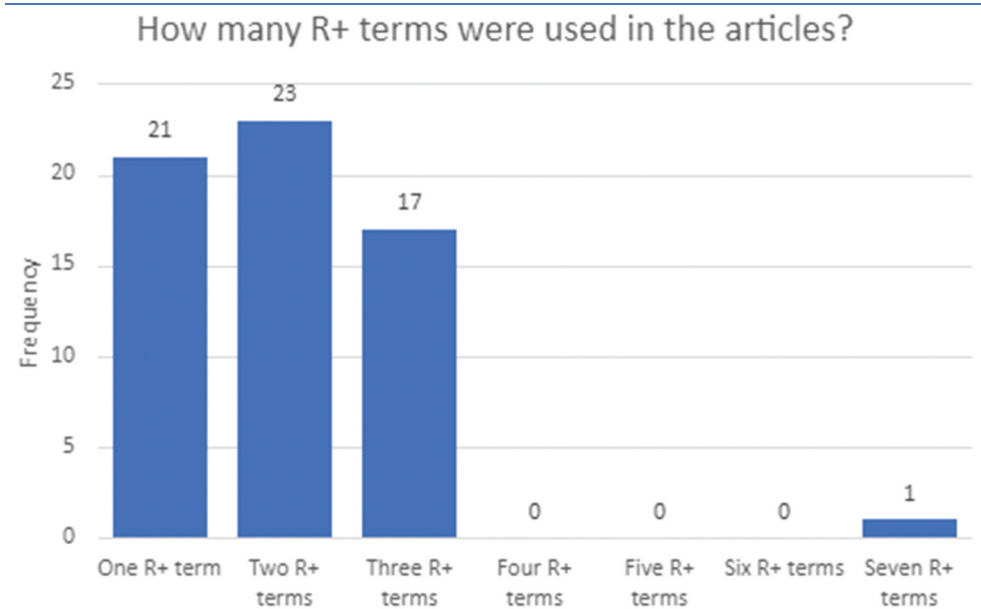


Table 3. Number of R+ terms used in the articles.

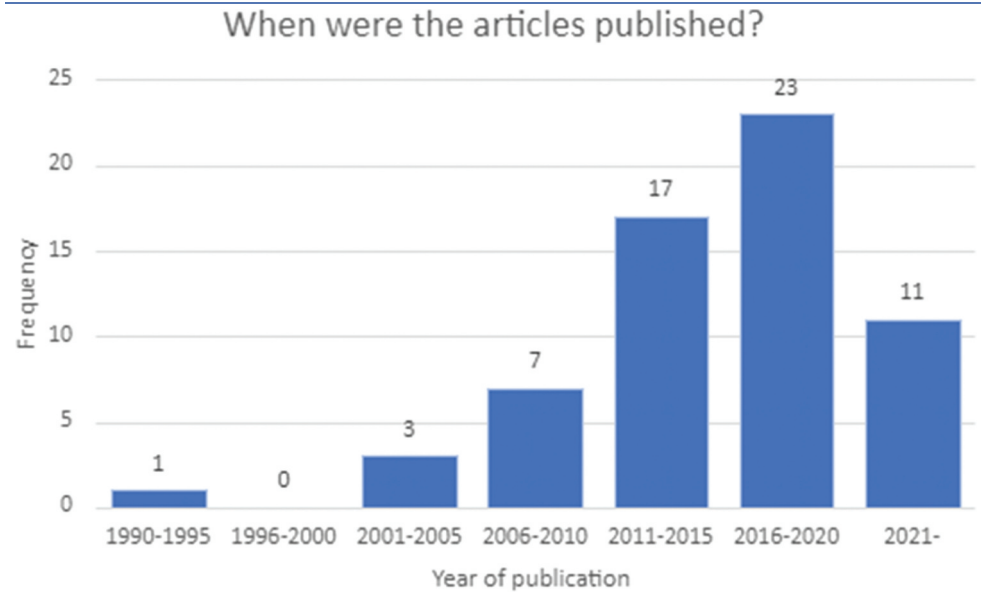


theoretical, although several refer to experiences from teaching, the development of specific courses, course curricula or student feedback from teaching.

In terms of chronology, our search yielded articles from 1995 to 2023 (Table 4).

Geographically, articles by scholars in the UK (21) and USA (14) far outnumber other countries, followed by Australia (4) and the Netherlands (4). The remaining countries account for 1 or 2 articles each. The only countries represented outside the global north are Turkey (Poulter and

Table 4. Year of publication.



Tosun 2020), Singapore (Tan 2013), South Africa (Ferreira and Schulze 2016; Jarvis 2021) and Taiwan (Wang 2013).

RQ1: How is R+ conceptualised?

With conceptualisation, we refer to definitions and understandings of the R+ term and the theoretical landscape or related concepts that shape the scholar's use or understanding of the R+ term. Overall, we were struck by the lack of definitions in many articles.⁸ This is perhaps unsurprising since many of the R+ terms, such as self-awareness and self-reflection, are difficult to define (cf. Visser et al. 2023, 72), but also that they might be considered self-explanatory. Moreover, in most articles, the R+ term does not receive conceptual attention (e.g. with a definition). However, it is invoked as a solution or remedy to a problem that the scholars address with more theoretical attention than the R+ term itself. R+ terms are always aspiring in the sense that authors see reflexivity as a positive outcome or valuable element in what they promote.

We have found 24 instances where R+ is explicitly defined. Jackson (2008) defines reflexivity as 'the relationship between the experience of students and the experience of whose way of life they are attempting to interpret', distinguishing between three parts (edification, constructive critique and reviewing methods of study). In some cases, reflexivity ala Jackson is reduced to edification alone (Vermeer 2010; Zembylas, Loukaidis, and Antoniou 2018). Some scholars offer definitions that resemble Jackson's definition. Thus in Brooks and Fancourt (2012, 132), we learn that '[reflexivity] captures pupils' reflection on all aspects of their learning, both intellectual progress, and changes in their attitudes and values'. According to Berglund (2014), reflexivity is part of an ethnographic approach to teaching religion in which teachers must reflect on their own understanding and motives relative to their educational choices. Similarly, Flanagan states that reflexivity encompasses the ability of an individual (teacher) 'to examine themselves introspectively, acknowledge how their views impact their current practice and use that knowledge and examination to transform their future practice' (2021b, 321). As early as 1995, Meijer defines reflexivity as the human possibility of reflecting upon one's own assumptions as well as those of others (1995, 95). Drawing on sociological theory, Sjöborg (2015) sees reflexivity to be a central late

modern value, whereas Geiger (2017) takes it to denote the skill by which persons discern evaluative distinctions (i.e. good/bad, just/unjust) in order to inhabit a moral space.

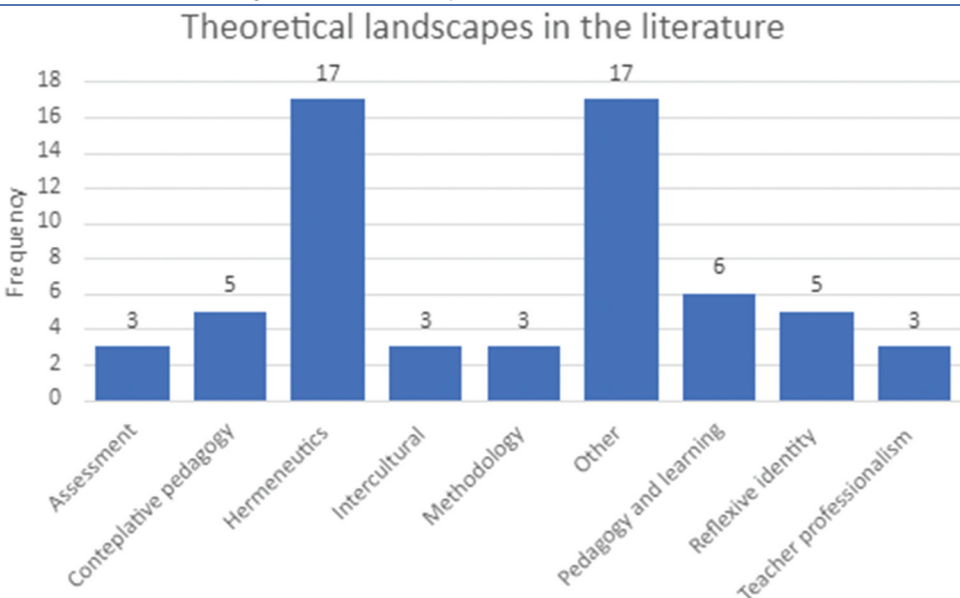
We also found definitions of other R+ terms. Metacognition is defined as: ‘enabling self-understanding through a reflection on one’s own ontology, epistemology, beliefs and values, as well as encouraging pupils to think about and monitor their thinking’ (Larkin et al. 2014, 176). In the context of learning about religions and intercultural communication, self-awareness is defined as a knowledge-building process focused inwardly to become aware of socialised biases and restructure negative associations (Lindsay 2020, 24, 27). ‘Conscious self-awareness’, in the context of teacher education, is elsewhere conceptualised as recognising biases and prejudices as one develops an understanding of how culture influences oneself and others (Bennett, Gunn, and Morton 2015, 650). On a more poetic note, self-understanding (‘Knowing Self’) is defined as exploring one’s beliefs and values in a way that requires a journey into one’s heart, soul and mind (Valk and Tosun 2016, 105).

R+ is sometimes treated as part of RE and other times as the result or outcome of RE. Both can, of course, co-exist, but some articles highlight the need for a reflexive RE (Shaw 2020) or reflexive activity in the classroom (Jackson 2016), while others that RE schooling leads to boys developing reflexive masculinities (Farrell 2015) or should lead to reflexive citizens (Barb 2021).

R+ is further described as different things in the literature: an activity, a process, a skill, a personality trait, and a value. In one article, Jackson states that ‘[r]eflexive activity is intimately related to the process of interpretation’ (2016, 157). Others similarly speak of a ‘reflexive process’ (Shaw 2023, 203; Skrefsrud 2022, 8) or ‘reflexive learning’ (Freathy and John 2019, 28, 33, 38). Hence, reading, thinking, discussing, and learning more or less reflexively is possible. In ‘contemplative pedagogy’ one can read about the ‘contemplative skill’ (du Val D’eprèmesnil 2020, 164). Geiger (2017) defines reflexivity as ‘the skill by which persons discern’ (512), whereas others see reflexivity embedded in notions of hermeneutic or critical reflective skills (Vermeer 2010). Things look different when scholars, inspired by sociologists, describe students who become reflexive as a result of RE, implying that reflexivity becomes part of their personality (Boeve 2012; Farrell 2015). Finally, reflexivity is also described as a value that RE students in Sweden aspire to uphold (Sjöborg 2015). Reflexivity is understood as being open, autonomous, and reflective in terms of beliefs and traditions (Sjöborg 2015).

Turning to theoretical landscape or related concepts that give shape to R+, we identified nine broad categories that further reveal the complexities of the landscape and the variety of ways in which scholars

Table 5. Classification according to theoretical landscapes.



frame R+. The eight categories are *hermeneutics, pedagogy and learning, contemplative pedagogy, reflexive identity, assessment, teacher professionalism, methodology, and intercultural* (Table 5). These are neither watertight categories nor do all the articles fit neatly into these. Most articles build on several theories or theoretical concepts, so we have had to interpret which we think are the most defining of how the author/s have framed R+.

Hermeneutics

The *hermeneutics* category comprises 15 articles. Some draw mainly on Jackson's framework for reflexivity (e.g. O'Grady 2010), while others draw substantially on Ricoeur or Gadamer while paying homage to the interpretive approach (e.g. Flanagan 2021a, 2021b). Flanagan (2021a, 2021b), for instance, applies Ricoeur to reflect on how RE teachers' personal worldview influences choices in the classroom. Shaw (2023) has many references to Jackson but also refers to Gadamer's hermeneutics to suggest that RE should consider the pupils' reflexive and dialogical encounter with the Other as an educational praxis where understanding, interpretation and application are continuously ongoing.

Pedagogy and learning

Six articles account for *pedagogy and learning*, primarily using theories of (general) pedagogy and learning as their framework. Examples include experiential learning (Skrefsrud 2022, McGuire 2021), transformative learning (Downie 2015), and deep learning (Elliott 2010). Here, self-reflection and self-awareness are the main R+ terms.

Contemplative pedagogy

Contemplative pedagogy includes five articles. The discourse around contemplative pedagogy is mainly a US liberal arts college education phenomenon, including various meditation techniques and aims at personal growth as well as stress reduction (e.g. Chien 2020, 3; Fort 2013, 2016). R+ terms include self-awareness, self-knowledge, and introspection, but never reflexivity. The concept of first-person inquiry is where R+ is located since it is about contemplating oneself and paying attention to the cognitive and emotional reactions to one's learning process (Chien 2020, 3).

Reflexive identity

Reflexive identity includes four sociologically oriented studies that conceptualise reflexivity in relation to identity. Thus, RE is seen to promote a reflexive identity (Farrell 2014, 2015), or RE students identify as reflexive (Sjöborg 2015). Farrell (2014, 2015) finds that the RE classroom produces more reflexive masculine subjects, as it offers young boys affected by gang culture a liminal space to reflect on their predicament.

Assessment

Assessment comprises three articles focusing on reflexivity. Here, we find three articles by or with Nigel Fancourt (Brooks and Fancourt 2012; Fancourt 2005, 2010). These articles are the only ones to properly link R+ to discussions and practices of assessment, including formative assessment and self-assessment, even though we included 'self-assess' in our literature search.

Teacher professionalism

Teacher professionalism includes three articles. Madden (2020, 2021) develops the notion of teacher professional learning in the context of Australian catholic RE, where self-awareness of one's beliefs and perspectives is a key component (2020, 237). Salter and Tett (2021) argue that conference participation enabled reflexive thinking in RE teachers, meaning that they could interrogate their ways of working and challenge taken-for-granted habits and beliefs. While these articles use teacher professionalism as the theoretical framing, many other articles are relevant to teacher professionalism (e.g. Berglund 2014; Flanagan 2021a, 2021b).

Methodology

Three articles employing reflexivity as their primary R+ term draw chiefly on how reflexivity is used in academic discourse on methodology. Methodological reflexivity is seen as having didactical value for RE. While Jackson drew on ethnography as a method and combined this with hermeneutical perspectives to develop his notion of reflexivity, Berglund's article (2014, 40–41) suggests bringing (student) teachers into a reflexive process via ethnographic fieldwork. Similarly, in two articles with Rob Freathy as the first author (Freathy et al. 2017; Freathy and John 2019), reflexivity is primarily related to research, methodology and pupils being a researcher capable of reflecting on how one's positionality affects investigation and enquiry into the subject matter.

Intercultural

Intercultural includes three articles that relate intercultural education or competencies to teaching and learning about religion. Here, we find an article by Jackson (2004) comparing 'reflexive intercultural education' to pedagogical approaches in RE, whereas Muszkat-Barkan (2022) reports on increased self-awareness and strengthened intercultural competence among Palestinian and Jewish teachers engaged in dialogue.

RQ2: What are the suggested purposes of R+?

Regardless of all the aspects that give each entry in our literature its uniqueness, the worldview plural society is a shared backdrop to which all but two articles⁹ relate explicitly. Overall, the literature explores various ways R+ may boost learning in RE or about religion, support individuals in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to live and thrive in plural societies or discuss the theoretical implications of R+ in religious education.

In the literature, the reflexive agent – i.e. who the authors identify as practising or benefitting from R+ – varies. Pupils are mentioned most frequently, exclusively or in combination with teachers or student teachers. Pupils are mentioned as reflexive agents in 30 articles, students in religious studies or taking a religious studies course in 13 articles, teachers in 12, student teachers in 8 articles, and academics in 3 articles.

Given our search design, the literature proposes R+ to a broad scope of RE education, and many authors combine or see purposes as interconnected (e.g. Fort 2016). When we examined the most frequently mentioned purposes, it became apparent that purposes could be classified into three categories: *Knowledge and learning* (23), *individual development* (19), and *professional development* (23) (Figure 2). Articles classified in the category *knowledge and learning* gravitate between concerns about how R+ can stimulate more nuanced, accurate or adequate knowledge and how R+ relates to the learning process. *Individual development* refers to purposes aimed at developing life skills and addresses the reflexive agent primarily as a human being. *Professional development* concerns how R+ may improve classroom strategies or boost skills or the identity of a RE teacher/instructor.

Knowledge and learning

In the category of *knowledge and learning*, we find claims that R+ is crucial to reveal one's own biases and stereotypical ideas about religion, enabling learners to see the 'religious other' anew, preferably guiding an appreciation of the inner diversity of religious traditions. Readers of BJRE will be familiar with Jackson's interpretive approach, which is part of the *knowledge and learning* category, given its aim to highlight the inner diversity of religious traditions. Another good example is Chien (2020), applying principles from contemplative pedagogy. She asserts that R+, coupled with first-person experiential learning, invites learners to encounter their misconceptions about Buddhism. By cultivating self-knowledge, she asserts that the students also develop a more sophisticated understanding of Buddhist teachings. A similar argument is made regarding achieving an in-depth understanding of the diversity in Islam (Defibaugh and Krutzsch 2017; Miller 2013). In these

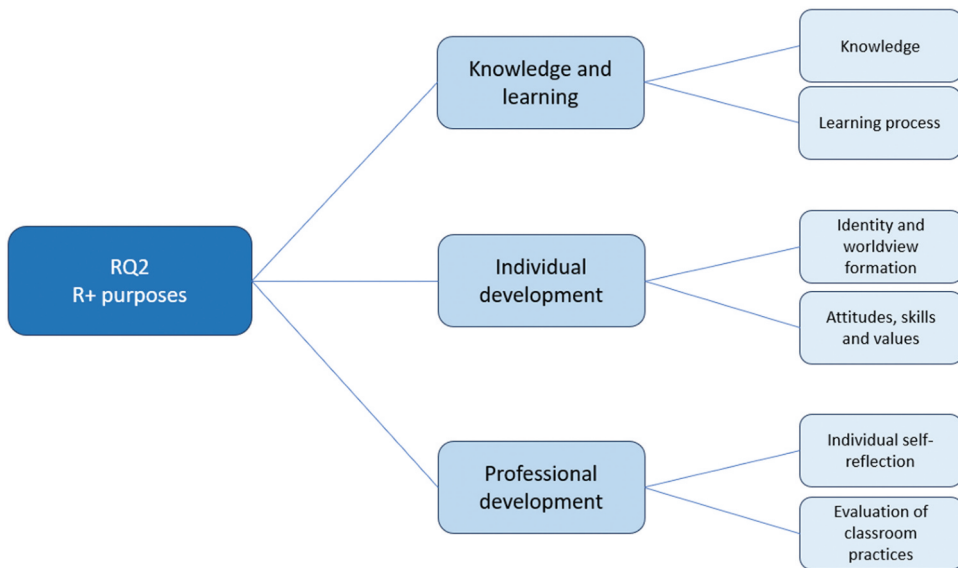


Figure 2. Classification of R+ purposes.

examples, authors focus on how R+ may assist when targeting higher-quality knowledge about religious traditions.

The articles within *knowledge and learning* gravitating more to *learning* discuss the role of R+ relating to different aspects relevant to the learning process in RE. Although difficult to distinguish entirely from cognitive goals, the pertinent aspects of the learning process are how R+ may contribute to bridging the gap between the (unfamiliar) subject content and the learners' subjective knowledge or experiences. Represented here as well, Jackson's concept of *reflexivity* is aimed at the learning process and recommends explicitly that learners critically evaluate the methods (Jackson 2004, 8). Other authors in this category point to different aspects of the learning process, including motivation (O'Grady 2005, 2010), self-assessment (Fancourt 2005, 2010), and critical reflection (Skrefsrud 2022). We also find examples of authors who see RE-learning as a process in which engaging with one's reactions and perspectives is crucial, thus labels like 'reflexive learning' (Freathy and John 2019, 28, 33, 38) and learning as a 'reflexive process' (Skrefsrud 2022, 8) occur. When learning is conceptualised as bridging a gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the process entails a willingness and effort to articulate one's own questions and grasp the claims and practices of the unfamiliar. R+ is thus seen as fruitful in examining and monitoring how learning happens as a (hermeneutical) movement between oneself and the other.

For Kevin O'Grady (2013), it was decisive to understand what motivates pupils to engage with their learning, introducing the term *dialogue with difference* (69) to capture what is at stake for the pupils and the integrity of RE. According to O'Grady, pupils are ready to engage in dialogue with the religious other if they expect their beliefs and ideas to be clarified and if the conversations allow them to explore and compare deeply held values and life stances in a personal, genuine manner (O'Grady 2013).

From the Norwegian context, Skrefsrud (2022) also argues the importance of activating and utilising the learners' experiences when learning in RE, especially to promote critical thinking. Rather than structuring his argument merely on RE theory, Skrefsrud's claims are rooted in the pedagogical theories of Freire, Dewey, and Vygotsky (2022). His model of RE, *experiential learning* (2022, 9), aims for personalised learning, although not founded on theology, that (rightfully or not) risks accusations of being implicitly or explicitly confessional and in breach of the requirements for

‘critical, objective, and plural’ teaching. The model aims to foster critical engagement, dialogue, and self-reflection to substantiate learners’ motivation and capacity for dialogue that may pave the way for intercultural understanding (Skrefsrud 2022).

Addressing yet another aspect of the learning process, Fancourt discusses the role of self-assessment (Brooks and Fancourt 2012; Fancourt 2005, 2010). He coined *reflexive self-assessment* after discovering that pupils did not differentiate between assessing their progress regarding factual knowledge, values (like tolerance and respect), and reflection (Fancourt, 2010, 301–302). In this empirical research, self-assessment was introduced to assessment strategies in RE and proved relevant to aims relating to factual knowledge as well as aspects relating to personal development (edification) (Fancourt 2010).

In the final examples of purposes connected to the learning process, R+ is linked to epistemological issues (Freathy et al. 2017; Freathy and John 2019; Larkin et al. 2014). They grant R+ a significant role in learning due to its potential to reveal the learner’s position ‘as a position’ (Larkin et al. 2014, 176) and raise the awareness of the ‘lenses’ (Freathy and John 2019, 32, 34) learners use. Subsequently, these authors suggest strategies to support the learners in examining and identifying their positionalities and how these affect their knowledge and experiences (Fort 2016).

Individual development

We now turn to the 20 articles (ten empirical, ten theoretical) that discuss how R+ may support individual development. This category describes how authors discuss R+, referring to purposes like identity and worldview formation, developing attitudes and values, and skills. Developing critical skills is the most frequently mentioned skill in the literature (e.g. Vermeer 2010).

Representing the earliest publication in our corpus, Meijer (1995) argues that identity formation relies on reflection and interpretation, thus suggesting a conceptualisation of personal identity as tentative, fallible, historical, flexible, and plural (94). Once the nature of identity has been clarified, the pressing issue for Meijer is whether identity formation should be targeted in education. Conclusively, she argues that RE is a suitable arena for identity formation and that this should be pursued by cultivating the ability to interpret or to cope with the quest for identity rather than to provide specific content to personal or collective identities (Meijer 1995).

Vermeer (2010) proposes a similar view of identity formation as a dynamic and social process (110). According to him, constructing individual identity requires *hermeneutical skills* and *critical reflective skills*, which involve being able to ‘account for one’s life’ (2010, 113). Vermeer suggests that classroom discussions about competing truth claims and competing values should supplement the interpretive approach as he sees these as vital to prompt reflexivity and naturally accompany identity formation (2010).

With *critical reflective skills*, we saw that Vermeer pointed to the ability to account for one’s choices, values, and convictions (2010, 113). Similarly, Ferreira and Schulze’s *spiritual intelligence* implies growing awareness of one’s own spiritual position while also being attentive to that of others (Ferreira and Schulze 2016). This is thought to support the capacity to stand up for own convictions (Ferreira and Schulze 2016, 231, 237). From a Catholic context, Boeve (2012) sees *reflexive identity* as an attribute that helps individuals orient themselves in a religious landscape dominated by individualisation and detraditionalisation. Expanding from discussions on identity formation, these examples demonstrate that R+ is assumed to propel an increasing awareness of one’s worldview positionality – simultaneously assuming everybody has one.

We previously mentioned that almost all articles relate explicitly to the worldview plural educational context. As such, identity and worldview formation happen with reference to or in dialogue with diversity. Developing a positive view of worldview diversity (e.g. Boeve 2012), including the necessary attitudes like empathy and compassion (du Val D’éprèmesnil 2020) and skills to engage well with diversity (Shaw 2020, 2023), are also crucial purposes of R+. From the American educational context, Barb (2021) argues for the potential of RE to contribute to developing *reflexive citizens* who live in and manage worldview diversity competently, wisely, and sensitively.

Professional development

The final aspect of suggested R+ purposes relates to professional development targeting academics (3 articles), teachers (12 articles) and student teachers (8 articles). This category addresses reflexive agents with similar roles, such as teaching RE or in the process of qualifying for this role. The purposes we identified in previous sections also apply to the professional; still, the authors discuss these relating to teaching practice and RE-teacher identity.

Like what we described in the category of *knowledge and learning*, R+ is thought of as an asset to help uncover unconscious aspects of one's own biases and tacit teaching practices. Increased self-awareness and self-reflection are thus considered to expose how personal worldviews may impact classroom representation (Berglund 2014) or to uncover teaching practices that unconsciously and unwillingly generate inequality and othering (Grümme 2021). Flanagan argues that reflexive introspection helps teachers become more self-aware and worldview-conscious (Flanagan 2021a, 2021b). Like Berglund (2014), the purpose of R+ is to pave the way to enhanced insight into how one's positionality affects professional decisions on, for instance, subject content, sequencing, and choice of learning activities (Flanagan 2021a, 2021b). Due to the nature of R+, there is a fine line between increased self-knowledge and clarifying own positionality and professional identity (Bakker and Avest 2019).

Bartz and Bartz (2018) argue that more sophisticated knowledge about worldviews will assist teachers in understanding pupils, managing classroom diversity, and facilitating an inclusive learning environment for all. Others recommend incorporating R+ when evaluating their teaching in professional partnerships and dialogue (Carr and Simmons 2010; Madden 2020).

RQ3: What practices are suggested to facilitate and support R+?

We find several suggested educational strategies in the articles, ranging from curriculum strategies (Lindsay 2020) to techniques for teacher feedback to colleagues or students (Geiger 2016, 2017). In RQ3, we specifically target the suggested classroom procedures to facilitate R+. Sometimes, however, authors advocate pedagogical ideas, frameworks, or approaches in which R+ is crucial (e.g. the interpretive approach). Miller (2013) argues that reflexivity (and the other key concepts of the interpretive approach) should be part of 'the social construct' of the RE classroom, stimulating the development of a 'community of interpretation' (56). *Hermeneutical tools* comprise articles that propose broad concepts like dialogue, reflection, or interpretation. However, these differ from the more detailed suggestions for classroom practice targeted in RQ3. Hence, Jackson's research is listed in *hermeneutical tools* but not subject to discussion in this section. Neither are the 25 articles categorised as NA (not applicable) in relation to RQ3 as they have other contributions than suggestions for facilitating R+.

32 articles (16 theoretical and 16 empirical) have specific instructional suggestions for RE teaching and learning. In many articles, R+ is depicted as a mediating tool to support the purposes of R+ that we identified in the previous section. The activities most frequently mentioned are writing, reading, discussion, and reflection. These are combined in various ways, and all these are connected to all the purposes we identified in the previous section. Structuring an ambivalent landscape, we identified three categories by examining the authors' suggested task structure and sequencing (Figure 3).

Authors who applied or based their suggestions on existing frameworks or approaches were classified into the category of *instructional approach*. A two-fold structure (tasks to encounter diversity, thus triggering R+ and tasks to support and enhance R+) is characteristic of the second category, *utilising diversity*. The third category, *contemplative practices*, was derived from a specific pedagogical model, the approach to contemplative practices, on which the articles are firmly based or inspired. The distinguishing features are how the activities are structured so that R+ becomes a significant part of learning in RE, not the isolated exercises (writing, reading, discussion, and reflection). A fourth category, *other*, encompasses the eight articles that did not fit neatly into either of the categories.

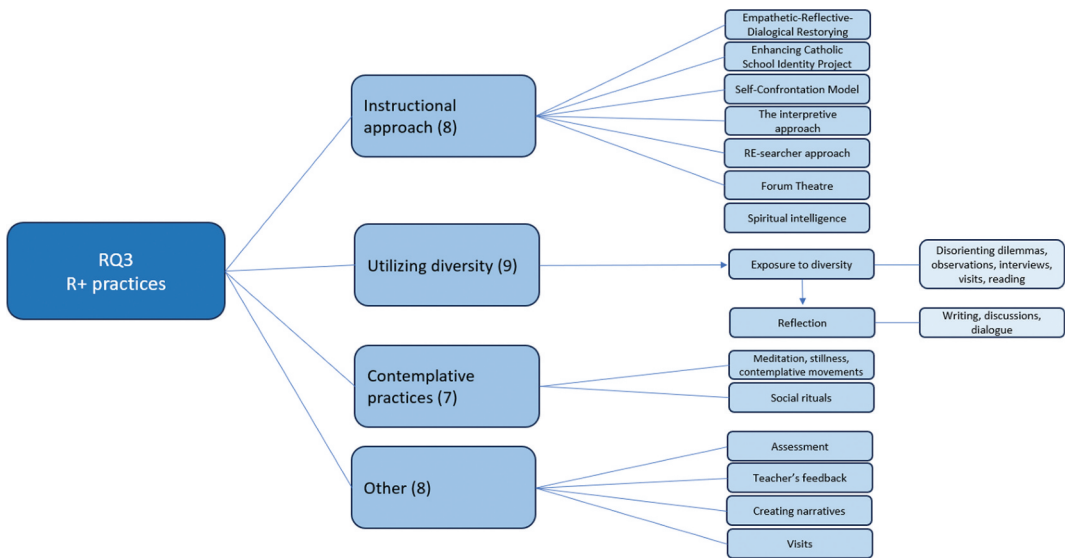


Figure 3. Classification of R+ practices.

Instructional approach

In the first category, *instructional approach*, we find that the suggested activities are part of didactical approaches, sometimes implemented from other fields than RE (e.g. Bakker and Avest 2019), which implies a specific task structure. Jarvis (2021) advocates integrating the Empathetic-Reflective-Dialogical Restorying (ERDR) model in teacher education to deconstruct myths of inferiority and promote agency and gender equation. Self-dialogue, self-narrative (written), dialogue, and restorying follow the model in a determined task structure (Jarvis 2021). Other models include the case-method teaching (Wang 2013), the *Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project* survey instruments (Madden 2020), and the *Self-Confrontation Method* (Bakker and Avest 2019).

Utilising diversity

We find a two-step workflow suggested in the second category, *utilising diversity*. The first step is to encounter diversity, which is thought to trigger R+, and the second is to support and enhance R+ through specific tasks (e.g. Downie 2015). Ethnographic methods like observation and interviews (e.g. Barrett 2021; Berglund 2014), reading texts, visits to or from religious communities (Valk 2009), and using disorienting videos or images to prompt self-reflection (Flanagan 2021b) are examples of activities suggested to encounter religious diversity. Writing tasks, discussions, and/or dialogue are suggested to support and enhance self-reflection. Illustrative is Barrett (2021), who reports that the students in a university course reflected on their biggest 'aha-moments' from the course in their final essay. Defibaugh and Krutzsch (2017) also suggest a similar (highly scaffolded) task structure in their undergraduate course on sexuality and vailing in Islam. Here, the students performed a Likert-scale assessment twice, one before the course activities and one after. The learning materials highlighted diverse accounts of vailing in Islam, and activities included self-reflective written tasks, think-pair-share activities, and whole-class discussions. At the end of the course, the students wrote a reflective text on how their perspectives had changed.

The two-fold task structure assumes a dynamic relationship between diversity and self-awareness, providing strategies to utilise the potential for building awareness of one's responses when engaging with the religious other. Noticeably, the learning trajectories are structured first by facilitating

an encounter with diversity and secondly, by strategies to pause, familiarise oneself with, and linger upon one's responses in reflection, discussions, and writing assignments.

Contemplative pedagogy

In the *contemplative pedagogy* category, writing is also essential, and writing journals or essays constitute typical examples. Still, the defining trait is that practices inherent to or inspired by religious practice are applied in teaching to give the students mental or physical experiences that become learning resources. Hence, walking, or silent mediation (Grace 2011), stillness (du Val D'éprèmesnil 2020) and other forms of contemplative movement (breathing, lying down, sitting, standing) and quiet alertness (Fort 2013, 2016) are suggested to raise awareness of own multisensory responses to the curriculum and the practices of others. McGuire (2019) introduces *secular analogue activities*, implying activities equivalent to religious practices without religious legitimation and reference. Examples include performing social rituals of politeness when learning about Confucian traditions to 'simulate Confucian concern for how one relates to others' (McGuire 2019, 117), performing yoga or taking a break (fast) from social media or scrolling when learning about Hinduism to imitate the ascetic notion of self-discipline (McGuire 2019, 118). When introduced to Sikhism, the students were invited to sing an inspirational song for 20 minutes every morning and every evening (McGuire 2019, 117–118).

Conclusively, contemplative pedagogy encourages learning opportunities that build on and integrate the students' personal mental and bodily experiences. Due to the personalised approach intended to scaffold an encounter with the perceived wisdom embedded in a religious tradition, contemplative pedagogy resembles confessional instruction. Recognising that contemplative pedagogy is unsuitable in non-confessional contexts, McGuire (2019) accommodates a secular context, suggesting analogue practices.

Others

The final category of articles covers various topics. Some of these suggest improving assessment in RE by clearly stating the objectives and asking the pupils to evaluate their learning using a traffic-light technique to evaluate their written work and overall progress, including their values (Brooks and Fancourt 2012; Fancourt 2005, 2010). For Geiger (2016, 2017), the teacher's attentive feedback to the pupil's thoughts, captured in their notebooks, is decisive for reflexivity to emerge and prosper. Further, Elliott (2010) finds that analysing and creating narratives can stimulate R+, while Carr and Simmons (2010) suggest comparing one's teaching to two metaphors for teaching styles: the Guru and the Deceiver. Lastly, in a course for Jewish and Arab teachers in Jerusalem, Muszkat-Barkan (2022) arranged field trips to visit each other's homes, communities, and places of religious worship to strengthen the participants' self-awareness.

Summary and implications for future research

In this scoping review on reflexivity and related concepts (R+), we have mapped 62 research articles on (1) their conceptualisation of R+ (2), the purposes authors suggest, and (3) what practices are suggested to facilitate reflexivity. In the methods section, we explained how the articles were identified and screened according to the criteria for inclusion. The scoping methodology was valuable to map and delineate the concept of reflexivity in religious education and has resulted in a nuanced classification of the three research questions. A scoping methodology does not include measures for evaluating the quality of included studies, and we are mindful of the limitations as we discuss implications and draw conclusions.

In RQ1, we discovered that R+ is perceived as an activity, a process, a skill, a personality trait, or a value. We identified no less than eight categories, indicating a lack of conceptual clarity and diverse

understanding of these concepts. While the variety of conceptualisations is fascinating, it underscores the need for a shared understanding. Rather than suggesting a common terminology, this mapping is a contribution to understanding reflexivity and related concepts. Our classification should be subject to scholarly debate and development but can nevertheless stimulate more conceptual awareness and consistent communication in RE research.

In the introduction, we noted the pivotal role of Jackson's interpretive approach in establishing reflexivity as a key concept in RE research. Our mapping confirmed his pivotal position in the field and found that the articles classified under *hermeneutics* either relate to or draw on his contributions to RE. Furthermore, authors classified in other categories have been associated with the research network initiated by him and his colleagues. These employ different aspects of Jackson's rather broad definition of reflexivity, where edification has received the most attention. It is tempting to imagine that Jackson's conceptualisation of reflexivity might have been the starting point of the proliferation of the term. Nevertheless, we found reflexivity and other related concepts in research contexts theoretically distinct from his (i.e. contemplative pedagogy). This study did not aim to identify the concept's origins or trace its historical development; however, we welcome further research in these areas.

Turning to RQ2, we found that pupils are the most frequently discussed group, followed by students in religious studies, teachers, student teachers, and academics. Worldview diversity serves as a context for how R+ is perceived to enhance learning and support individual and professional development. Furthermore, we classified the suggested purposes into three categories: *knowledge and learning*, *individual development*, and *professional development*. A shared idea is that R+ is thought to contribute to some transformation. However, the R+ element is often integrated into different educational approaches, frameworks, or visions for RE. For instance, using R+ to evaluate learning is distinct from its application to develop personal identity or worldview. Our research suggests that many purposes are possible, and there are no inherent or generic functions of R+. This is another reminder for researchers to consider what purposes they envision and not when arguing for reflexivity or related concepts.

For the final research question, we classified the 32 articles we found to have suggestions for classroom practices to facilitate R+. We found that the isolated activities authors most often suggest are writing, reading, discussion, and reflection. However, to display the characteristic features in the literature, we established three categories based on the authors' task structures: *instructional approach*, *utilising diversity*, and *contemplative pedagogy*.

Another distinction regarding facilitation became apparent to us. Some authors seem to consider R+ as naturally occurring when exposed to and engaging with unfamiliar perspectives, as in RE and religious studies. Note Jackson's overall definition of reflexivity as 'the relationship between the experience of students and the experience of whose way of life they are attempting to interpret' (Jackson 2008, 174). From this perspective, reflexivity is a process that naturally occurs, and our responsibility is to raise awareness among students and teachers. A more common understanding in our field is that R+ is something that can be triggered, enhanced, and utilised through the interaction between a student or teacher and the subject matter.

Our study found that contemplative pedagogy (CP) stands out both conceptually and concerning practice. Recommended classroom activities draw heavily on religious practice, elements thereof, or analogue activities and are directed at capitalising on personal experience. CP reminds us of the diversity of legal frameworks for religious studies and RE across contexts. In the American context, some CP authors cite research indicating that students expect both a personal (spiritual) and an academic outcome when enrolling in a college course in religious studies. Such aims would be

controversial in many European countries as RE teaching is subject to principles of non-confessional RE, prohibiting any form of proselytising.

In conclusion, this study is a contribution to our understanding of R+ by providing a classification of R+ conceptualisations, the diverse purposes suggested, and the many ways it is thought to be facilitated in religious education. Looking forward, we hope this mapping and Supplementary material will be a valuable resource to those seeking to undertake a similar project or engage R+ terms in their research endeavours. We hope it inspires conceptual clarity and consistency, furthers empirical research, and ultimately contributes to enhancing the quality and impact of our collective research.

Notes

1. It is worth noting that Jackson's notion of reflexivity, and edification in particular, was developed in relation to the concept of learning from religion (Jackson 1997, 131–2).
2. Self-awareness competency is listed as one of eight key competences in UNESCO's framework for education for sustainable development (UNESCO 2017).
3. A systematic approach 'require an a priori protocol with a pre-specified objective, question(s), and inclusion/exclusion criteria; comprehensive searching; protocol driven screening and selection of included sources; more than one author; and should be conducted following established methodological guidance and reported using reporting standards, such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR)' (Munn et al. 2022, 951).
4. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (the PRISMA-ScR) (see Peters et al. 2020).
5. We were, for instance, surprised to find that our search strategy did not pick up relevant publications we knew of (e.g. Shaw 2023).
6. Examples include Jackson's seminal book *Religious Education: An interpretive approach* (1997), RE publications from Waxmann, but also teaching materials such as those related the RE-searcher approach introduced by Freathy et al. (2015). However, it is our hope that key ideas about R+ from these authors are found in their research articles included in the review.
7. Nine articles use 'reflexivity' as the only R+ term.
8. At an early stage, this research question was aimed at definitions, but we quickly realised we better expand the question since few articles define R+.
9. Carr and Simmons (2010) and du Val D'éprémesnil (2020).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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