

Impact case study (REF3b)

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| Institution: York St John University |
| Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education) |
| Title of case study: The Influence of Research-Oriented CPD on Religious Education Professionals |
| 1. Summary of the impact <p>Professor Julian Stern was one of the lead organisers of, and contributors to, a series of eleven research-oriented seminars (between 2004 and 2010), bringing together teachers, advisors, and higher education professionals working on, and interested in, religious education research in UK schools and internationally. This impact case study identifies the influence of those seminars on the 161 participating professionals, on pupils, and on schools. Evidence is provided of the widespread and long-term impact of the research, particularly on the participants and on pupils, both directly through the seminars and through the various seminar-related publications.</p> |
| 2. Underpinning research <p>Underpinning research covered a range of issues in religious education, notably the use in religious education of sacred texts, dialogue, inclusion, pedagogy, human rights, ethnography, philosophy, pupil and teacher lives, and creativity. Julian Stern's work discussed within these seminars included research programmes on inclusion (carried out from 1997 to 2001), pedagogy (carried out from 2001 to 2010), philosophy (carried out in 2006), and creativity (carried out between 1998 and 2010). His published outputs provided a research base for all of the first six seminars, and for elements of all eleven seminars, theorising the relationship between research and pedagogy, and between research and professional practice. Other research underpinning the seminars was undertaken (between 1997 and 2010) by each of the 42 presenters at the seminars – themselves including participants based in schools, advisory work, and higher education institutions.</p> <p>Julian Stern's research programme underpinning these seminars was carried out whilst employed, at Brunel University (1997-2001), the University of Hull (2001-2008), and subsequently at York St John University. The research programme was linked through his membership (from 1998 to the present day) of the Christian Education Movement (later Christian Education) Research Committee, whose successful bid to the Westhill Endowment Trust for funding supported the organisation of all the seminars.</p> <p>One of the first and critical insights from Stern's research was his theorising of the relationship between research and pedagogy, which related the learning of pupils (especially that described as 'creative' learning) to the learning of teachers and so to the specialist learning described as 'research'. It makes use of imagined 'typical' conversations in classrooms to form the basis of an analysis of the relationship between pupils and teachers and the 'subject' of lessons (notably, religious education lessons). Initial research using this methodology (Stern 2007b) was reported in one of the seminars, and participants in the seminar then became research participants themselves, which led to a subsequent report as a complete project (Stern 2010).</p> <p>A second key insight from Stern's research concerned the relationship between research and professional practice. The research 'virtue' of <i>sincerity</i> was established as central to gaining an understanding of schools and of research. This insight was developed with participants in the earliest of the seminars, and initially reported in 2006, and later developed more fully in 2007 – leading to work at specialist international conferences on the virtue and value of practice-based research, organised in 2011 and 2012 (and reported in Stern 2013b).</p> |

3. References to the research

1. Johnson, C and Stern, L J (2005) 'Westhill Seminar 6: Ethnography, Pluralism and Religious Education', *Resource*, 28:1 Autumn 2005, pp 3-6.
2. Stern, L J (2006) *Teaching Religious Education: Researchers in the Classroom*. London: Continuum.
3. Stern, L J (2007) *Schools and Religions: Imagining the Real*. London: Continuum.
4. Stern, L J (2010) 'Research as Pedagogy: Building Learning Communities and Religious Understanding in RE', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 32:2, March 2010, pp 133-146.
5. Stern, L J (2013a) 'The Influence of Research Within Religious Education: The Westhill Seminars, RE Professionals, Pupils and Schools', *British Journal of Religious Education*, p 1-21, 2013.
6. Stern, L J (2013b) 'Virtue and Value in Educational Research', chapter 10, in Arthur, J and Lovat, T (eds) (2013) *The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values*; Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, pp 114-123.

There are two significant textbooks included here. Item 2 was written for school teachers and those undertaking teacher education programmes in religious education, and funding was provided by the Westhill Endowment Trust to provide the book to all new teachers of religious education in the UK for up to three years after publication. Item 3 was written as an academic text for those working at Master's and doctoral level in religious education, and that was submitted to the RAE 2008. These two presented the initial research, which has produced a number of other outputs.

Items 4 and 5 are peer-reviewed journal articles, with item 4 submitted in REF 2014 and item 5 presenting an extended account of the research on impact presented in this case study.

The further outputs building on the earlier research (i.e. items 2 and 3) include ongoing projects which have been reported at later dates (as in item 6).

4. Details of the impact

Impact on professionals

The influence of the seminars on professionals (evidenced by questionnaires) was perceived by respondents as being mostly on the way they teach (88% agree/strongly agree that 'seminars changed for the better the way I teach'), and their confidence in teaching (85% agree/strongly agree). Somewhat surprisingly, not far behind was the influence of publications from the seminars, with 78% agreeing/strongly agreeing that those 'changed the way I teach', and 75% saying the publications 'increased my confidence'. There was much less perceived influence of the seminars on the participants' status (21% agreed/strongly agreed) or careers (20% said the seminars 'encouraged me to apply for or take up a more senior post'), than on professional practice. One respondent was 'inspired ... to write an article for publication' and 'I used the information in a staff meeting to encourage more creativity and a cross curricular approach to RE'.

The importance of the publications was the most surprising outcome of this aspect of the research, as evidenced by a review of the book reporting on the first series of seminars:

This book shows that all teachers can be actively engaged in research practice in RE. I have become more aware of the significance of the small-scale research that I have been developing over many years, and the book has reminded me of the importance of being, and remaining, a reflective practitioner. (Review of Stern 2006 in *REsource: The Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education*, 29:3: Summer 2007, p 20-21.)

Impact on pupils and on schools

Over 20 000 pupils were taught religious education by seminar participants during the year of the seminar, and the religious education of over 1 000 000 pupils was the responsibility of seminar participants who were advisors and (through teacher education programmes) lecturers in higher education. The remarkable reach of the potential impact, as reported here, covers much of England and Scotland and parts of Wales.

The greatest perceived impact on pupils, as reported by their teachers, was on their learning (74% agree/strongly agree) and their ‘interest ... in RE’ (72% agree/strongly agree). There was also some significant perceived impact on pupils being ‘confident in the value of RE’ (58% agree/strongly agree) and ‘doing more research and other forms of independent learning’ (42% agree/strongly agree). One respondent (based in higher education) said that ‘after the creativity seminars I have introduced some new ideas for linking art in my sessions and the students have been very positive about trying out some ideas with their pupils in schools’. A primary teacher explained:

I have been teaching RE to year 5 and year 2 children at one school I supply to. The seminar has changed the way I approach RE and the enjoyment for the children is brilliant to watch.

The confidence of respondents in the impact of the seminars (and therefore the research) on pupils is noteworthy. There is also some evidence of impact on schools. It was thought somewhat ‘easier to defend or expand the role of RE in the curriculum’ (51% agree/strongly agree), and religious education was thought to have a ‘higher status’ by 33% of respondents, and research seminars were ‘more popular or better supported’ in schools according to 30%. As one respondent said, the ‘popularity and public profile that the Westhill seminars have achieved’ has had ‘an indirect impact on schools and pupils – but a real one I think’.

Why the seminars were influential

Most important of the reasons given for the seminars’ impact was ‘new ideas about teaching RE’ (88% agree/strongly agree) and ‘time to think about RE with others who were interested in RE’ (83% agree/strongly agree). The seminars meant participants were ‘able to share ideas with other participants’ (80% agree/strongly agree), and so could discover more about religious education research (72% agree/strongly agree). 65% felt the impact was through being ‘able to connect ... research ... to classroom practice’, with 89% of respondents identifying having time to reflect as very influential or influential. This evidence indicates that the value of research-informed thinking and discussion, having ‘time to think about courses I run and evaluate new approaches with other advisors and teachers’, overrides simply receiving information about research.

Overall, the seminar series was an effective way of generating impact from the research programme, with the more surprising responses including the significance of publications, the confidence with which the seminars were thought to influence school pupils, and the perceived significance of the importance of time to reflect and engaging in discussion, more than the specific presentations.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Participants in the seminars, reported in section 4, were all external to the submitted HEI. The report of the research on influence is itself published in a peer-reviewed international research journal (Stern 2013a, above).

Reviews of and references to Stern 2006:

Dyson, J, Still, L and Clinton, C (2007) Review of Julian Stern’s ‘Teaching Religious Education’, *REsource: The Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education*, 29:3,

Impact case study (REF3b)

Summer 2007, p 20-21.

Review in the *PAT (Professional Association of Teachers)* magazine (April 2007, p 18).

Review in the *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 28:2, August 2007, pp 223-224, by Hugo Whately, King's College London.

Review in the *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30:1, January 2008, pp 83-85, by Nigel Fancourt.

Rudge, L (2007) *Using Research in Religious Education to Develop Reflective Practice*; <http://re-net.ac.uk/attachments/cd9df337-55104e99-9611-5c2706b3190b.pdf>. (Several references to Stern 2006.)

Walters, R (2009) *Religious Education and Pedagogy*; <http://re-net.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?Keyword=linda+rudge&SearchOption=And&SearchType=Keyword&RefineExpand=1&ContentId=15759>. (Details on the use and influence of one of the seminars at which Stern was also a presenter.)

Barnes, L P (ed) (2012) *Debates in Religious Education*; London: Routledge.

Individual contacts for corroboration:

RE Today Adviser and NATRE Executive Member, Christian Education – he was present at many of the Westhill Seminars, and is the professional lead for the National Association for Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE).

HMI, Subject Specialist Adviser: Religious Education – he was present at one of the seminars and, for Ofsted, leads on inspection of religious education.

Head of RE, Aston Comprehensive School, Aughton Road, Swallownest, Sheffield S26 4SF – he was present at one or two of the seminars, and is a teacher who is influenced by and active in research.