Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Warwick

Unit of Assessment: Education

Title of case study: Integrating interpretive and dialogical research by Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) into European/international policy and practice on teaching about religions

1.Summary of the impact

Research into more effective ways of teaching about religions has been used to develop and implement European education policy by providing advice to policy makers, schools and teacher trainers across Europe, and to create teaching/teacher-training resources. Jackson and the WRERU team have collaborated with major international organisations including the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UN Alliance of Civilizations, and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to promote using interpretive and dialogical approaches to teaching about religions. As a result, students benefit from improvements to religious and intercultural education, and teachers benefit from substantial training programmes and resources developed to support these approaches. Impact is recognised through an international award from the Religious Education Association (USA), to be presented in Boston, November 2013.

2. Underpinning research

Various international and European institutions (e.g. UN, Council of Europe, OSCE) have recommended that high quality study of religions in schools is needed to develop understanding and promote social cohesion. In response, the Warwick research has been concerned with the development of models for helping young people to (a) represent religions fairly and accurately, taking account of their internal diversity; (b) interpret the religious language and practices of others and to express their own understandings to others; (c) to engage reflexively with material studied (including using skills of empathy and nuanced criticism), and to reflect on issues of tolerance and respect for difference within democratic societies. Research pioneered in the 1990s has developed through a range of funded projects over 20 years; key projects related to interpretive and dialogical approaches are mentioned below.

Ethnography and Religious Education (ESRC £180,000) 1990-93 (Jackson PI + 3)

Through a major project on Ethnography and Religious Education, research on the transmission of religious culture to young people from different ethnic and religious communities in England was integrated with the development of pedagogy. The research revealed tensions between young people's self-understanding of their religions and textbook and teacher representation of those traditions, challenging the dominant phenomenological paradigm for the study of religions. Jackson's interpretive approach offered an alternative methodology for representing religions, examining the relationship between understandings of individuals, groups and different perceptions of the wider tradition. Research also revealed issues of interpretation, especially concerned with understanding of religious language and non-verbal communication through forms of practice. Reflexivity was also included in this pedagogy, involving methods for close engagement with material, critical distance, reflection on concepts of tolerance and respect, and critical review of study techniques [1-3].

Pupil/Pupil Dialogue (All Saints Educational Trust 2000-2 , Westhill Endowment Trust 2003-7, and 2007-9 £85,000 total: Jackson PI, Ipgrave senior researcher + WRERU team)

The work on the interpretive approach was developed in various WRERU action research studies, including Ipgrave's research on pupil/pupil dialogue (evaluated in [4]). Building on Jackson's work, Ipgrave developed a dialogical approach, involving exchange between pupils of different religious/non-religious and ethnic backgrounds, with children in the same school and in different schools via email [5]. Through analysis of children's language concerning religion and values, Ipgrave identified stages through which children's dialogue needs to pass and conditions in school which must be met in order to facilitate understanding at depth. The approach encourages personal engagement with concepts from different religions; children's knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed to reflect on their contributions, to justify their opinions, to recognize alternative viewpoints and be open to the arguments of others.

REDCo (European Commission Framework 6, €1.2 million among 9 European universities) 2006-9; Jackson PI for Warwick team; Ipgrave + whole WRERU team.

Jackson's interpretive methodology underpinned *the whole* EC Framework 6 REDCo (Religion,

Education, Dialogue, Conflict) Project involving 9 universities from 8 European Countries in combined methods research with adolescents (2006-9) [6]. In addition to Jackson's impact on the whole project through the interpretive methodology [3], the Warwick team conducted all qualitative (including 7 action research studies) and quantitative studies (with teachers/students) in England, as well as contributing to comparative studies [7]. The REDCo project developed the interpretive approach in its main cross-national project studies using the principles in designing fieldwork with young people across 8 countries, data analysis (of ethnographic work, videography and quantitative questionnaires) and comparison of findings across national contributions. The research revealed the wish of the majority of 14-16 year olds studied to learn about each other's religions and worldviews in the safe space of the classroom, with discussion facilitated by well-trained teachers; they also expressed their concern that many resources and teachers present religions as homogeneous, ignoring the particularities experienced by many students. New insights from various national and cross-national studies were added to the interpretive methodology [3]. Jackson's interpretive research has been extended by former Warwick doctoral students [8].

3. References to the research

1. Jackson, R. (1997/2002) *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*, London, Hodder and Stoughton. [Peer reviewed research monograph]

2. Jackson, R. (2004) *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy*, London, RoutledgeFalmer. [This book was selected for panel discussion by the American Academy of Religion, the leading American academic forum for the study of religions, in San Antonio in 2004.]

3. Jackson, R. (2012) The Interpretive Approach as a Research Tool: Inside the REDCo Project in R. Jackson (Ed.) *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research*, London: Routledge, 84-102. [Peer reviewed collection]

4. McKenna, U. Ipgrave, J. & Jackson, R**.** (2008) *Inter Faith Dialogue by Email in Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the Building E-Bridges Project,* Münster, Waxmann.

5. Ipgrave, J. (2013) The language of inter faith encounter among inner city primary school children, *Religion & Education.* 40:1, 35-49 [Peer reviewed paper in a special issue of American journal dedicated to religious education research at Warwick and the work of Jackson in particular]

6. Weisse, W. (2012) Reflections on the REDCo Project, in R. Jackson (Ed.) *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research*, London: Routledge, 10-24. [Peer reviewed collection]

7. Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R. & O'Grady, K. (Eds) (2009) *Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach*, Münster, Waxmann. [Peer reviewed collection]

8. Miller, J., O'Grady, K. and McKenna, U.(Eds) (2013) *Religion in Education: Innovation in International Research*, New York and London: Routledge [Peer reviewed collection of Warwick contributions to research influenced by the interpretive approach]

4. Details of the impact
A. Policy Development
The research findings on the importance of interpretive and dialogical approaches to teaching about religions (contributing to religious, intercultural and citizenship education) have made an impact on the way the subject is taught across Europe and North America through informing policies that shape educational practices, and by providing training and materials to teachers and teacher trainers to improve their work. Influence on policy has been achieved through engagement with two major international bodies: the Council of Europe (with 47 member states and many observer states) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has 56 participant states, (most European states plus the USA and Canada).
The Council of Europe
The interpretive and dialogical approaches have strongly influenced the development of policy at the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe makes policy recommendations through its Committee of Ministers to the governments of member states for use by policymakers, educators and civil society. Jackson was a leading member of the Council of Europe's first project on teaching religions in public education across Europe (*Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education*). In addition to writing material on interpretive and dialogical approaches for the project book [i], widely circulated and translated into several languages, Prof Jackson was also one of the

drafters of the Recommendation to member states (addressed to policy makers, schools and teacher trainers) on behalf of the Committee of Ministers [ii] advocating the use of interpretive and dialogical approaches. The Recommendation is now in active use in various European countries (see below) where Jackson is working with educators and policy makers.

Following this Ministerial Recommendation Professor Jackson was commissioned to be vice-chair of the expert group concerned with utilising the Recommendation in the member states to bring about change in policy and practice across Europe [iii]. Jackson has written a book, *'Signposts': Teaching about Religions and Non-religious Worldviews: Towards Policy and Practice in European States,* to be published by the Council of Europe and circulated in 2014 to all 47 member states, and to be followed up by training courses from the European Wergeland Centre (EWC). Since 2011 Jackson has been working with policymakers and educators from member states who are incorporating ideas from the Recommendation into their national policies. Publications related to this have appeared in Italy, Ireland, Norway and Estonia and on the EWC website [eg.iii]. See letter from Head of Education, Council of Europe [iv].

OSCE Toledo Guiding Principles

The OSCE is the world's largest security organisation, and includes an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights dealing with the human dimension of security, including educational projects intended to promote human rights. In 2007 the OSCE produced a policy document on education about religions and beliefs - the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs*, the first international policy document of its kind [v]. It is designed to assist educators, legislators, teachers and officials in education ministries and schools to ensure that teaching about different religions and beliefs is carried out in a fair and balanced manner. Jackson was a leading member of the drafting team and the document's inclusive tone was strongly influenced by the interpretive and dialogical approaches developed at Warwick, (e.g. pp 47, 48, 55 summarise these approaches and associated REDCo research and refer to publications). The Principles were translated into several major languages and distributed across the OSCE region. The *Toledo Guiding Principles* are being used as a standard setting document by international organisations, policy makers across Europe and North America, and increasingly in other countries such as Australia. They provide the rationale for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations website on Education about Religions and Beliefs [vi].

B. Teacher Training

In addition to policy shaping, Jackson has used the interpretive and dialogical approaches to influence teacher training in different parts of Europe and beyond through a variety of major international projects:

Council of Europe

As well as the Handbook from the *Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education* project that is widely used in European in-service training of teachers, Warwick research has also been used in a second Council of Europe initiative, *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters.* As part of this project, Ipgrave and Jackson's dialogical and interpretive approaches have been incorporated into materials for training teachers in intercultural education [vii]. Ipgrave led training courses, using this material, in Sofia in October 2010 for teachers from 23 European countries, and in Strasbourg in June 2011 for trainers from 14 countries. Subsequently, each trainer organised a training session for teachers to bring about beneficial change within their own country. Feedback from the Sofia seminar suggests that this includes trainees reflecting on barriers to effective intercultural communication (such as stereotyping); deeper knowledge and interpretation of cultural and intercultural issues and improved attendance, positive attitudes, raised interest, and motivation. Dr Ipgrave has written an online intercultural training course to reach more practitioners across Europe and the Arab nations (piloted by the Council of Europe, Summer 2013).

The European Wergeland Centre

The European Wergeland Centre is a Europe-wide resource centre for values educators established in 2009 and co-sponsored by the Council of Europe and the Norwegian Government. Material on the EC Framework 6 REDCo Project, incorporating developments in the interpretive approach, has been widely used in Europe on courses for teachers organised by the European Wergeland Centre [iii]. These include courses for teachers from Scandinavia, southern Europe and western Europe. Articles on using the interpretive approach in practice are distributed freely to stakeholders via the EWC website, with over 500 hits.

Tony Blair Faith Foundation (TBFF)

The interpretive and dialogical methodologies have influenced the Tony Blair Faith Foundation's Face to Faith programme, involving young people in schools from countries engaging in dialogue through video-conferencing. Members of the WRERU team were commissioned to conduct annual evaluations of the Face to Faith Programme 2009-13, including observation of interchanges and interviews with teachers and pupils on site in Palestine, India, Lebanon, Italy, Jordan, and the UK. These reports have influenced the conduct of future practice by the Foundation. The TBFF uses Ipgrave's research on dialogue to monitor the quality of the programme. Ipgrave has also made presentations (at TBFF in London) for international teachers involved in the Face to Faith programme (see letter from CEO, TBFF [viii]).

C. International Recognition: The William Rainey Harper Award

In recognition of the impact of his and WRERU's research Professor Jackson has been awarded the prestigious William Rainey Harper Award from the Religious Education Association (USA). *"The William Rainey Harper Award was named after the first President of the University of Chicago…It is given to outstanding leaders whose work in other fields has had profound impact upon religious education"*. Professor Jackson becomes only the 12th recipient of the international award since its launch in 1975, and he joins the ranks of Marshall McLuhan, Margaret Mead and Paulo Freire. The award will be formally presented in Boston in November 2013. [ix]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

i) Keast, J. (Ed.) (2007) *Diversité Religieuse et Éducation Interculturelle: Manuel de Référence à l'usage des Écoles,* (Strasbourg: Editions du Conseil de l'Europe). Translated into 5 languages: Contains material on the interpretive and dialogical approaches. Used on teachers' courses supported by the Council of Europe in many European countries.

ii) Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. https://wcd.coe.int//ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2008)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864. [cites the influence of the 'Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education' research]

iii) European Wergeland Centre – a presentation by Jackson for practitioners to aid understanding of the Council of Europe recommendation to member states http://www.theewc.org/library/category/view/learning.about.religions.and.beliefs.developments.in.european.policy.and.practice./ Jackson's role in the joint committee at http://www.theewc.org/news/view/5th.meeting.of.the.joint.coeewc.expert.group./

iv) Letter from Head of Education, Council of Europe on the impact of Jackson and Ipgrave's research

v) *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*: http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154 - Jackson is listed as an expert advisor and the interpretive methodology and dialogical approach is outlined on pp 47, 48, 55.

vi) UN Alliance of Civilisations 'Education about religions and beliefs' website http://erb.unaoc.org/partners/ [the clearinghouse website lists Warwick WRERU as a partner]

vii) Council of Europe (2009) *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, Strasbourg, Language Policy Division, Council of Europe (booklet and DVD published in French and English including materials developed by Jackson & Ipgrave et al., available online at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/AutobiographyTool_en.asp).

viii) Letter from Chief Executive of Tony Blair Faith Foundation on the impact of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit research in evaluating the Face to Faith Programme.

ix) Jackson to receive William Rainey Harper Award http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/insite/news/intnews2/bob_jackson/ and http://www.religiouseducation.net/harper