Human Rights: A Core Element or Big Idea for RE?

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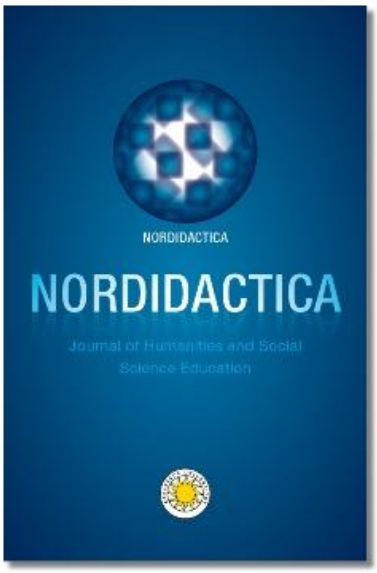

Nordidactica

- Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education

2019:4

Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education
Nordidactica 2019:4
ISSN 2000-9879
The online version of this paper can be found at: www.kau.se/nordidactica

NORDIDACTICA – JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION
ISSN 2000-9879
2019:4 109-132

Human Rights: A Core Element or Big Idea for RE?[1]

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Abstract: In this article, I refer to the changing political context in the West, noting the need for collaborative action in addressing issues of living together, despite differences of religion and worldview. Such collaborations need to operate within and beyond schools. Next, I affirm the value of 'big ideas' in offering principles for selecting curriculum material for RE, but noting that 'human rights' is not itself a 'big idea' (in the sense used by Barbara Wintersgill). I go on to review some arguments for studying religious and worldview diversity in public schools, noting the relevance of human rights and responsibilities to these. I relate the emergence of the interpretive approach to religious education and our research at Warwick to the discussion, noting human rights especially in relation to arguments for 'inclusive' RE based on an analysis of world society and with living in plural societies. I introduce the work of the Council of Europe focusing on the religious dimension of intercultural education, and trace the establishment of the European Wergeland Centre, summarising a project on religions and education which involved the publication of the book Signposts. The work of the Signposts International Research Network, in applying human rights principles in educational contexts, is discussed. In conclusion, I emphasise the need for researchers to collaborate with teachers in school-based research as important to promoting human rights. Such collaboration parallels group cohesion and improvisation in the performance of jazz music.

KEYWORDS: HUMAN RIGHTS, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, RELIGIONS, WORLDVIEWS, INTERPRETIVE APPROACH, COUNCIL OF EUROPE, DIALOGICAL LIBERALISM

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[1] This article is the text of my keynote lecture, presented at the Nordic Conference on Religious Education, NTNU, Trondheim, in July 2019

Introduction

First, I will comment on the changing political context in which religious education is taught in Western countries. Violent events resulting from political and religious extremism, the growth of the political far right in many European/Western countries, and the increasing complexity of multicultural societies, and of the populations of some of the schools within those societies, point to the need for collaborative action by educators (including teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers) and community members in addressing issues of living together despite differences of religion or belief.

In my own country, the debates concerning Brexit have been highly negative and divisive, with much stereotyping of religious and ethnic communities both within and outside British society, exacerbated especially by far right politicians and right wing popular newspapers. Thankfully, most schools in England continue to uphold policies that aim to encourage children and young people to live together well, despite differences of belief or ethnicity, and despite pressures (via government policy) to focus almost entirely on academic achievement. Thus, it is important that research is conducted which gives insight into challenges faced by schools, and indicating some possible ways forward in responding to particular issues.

To take an example from Sweden, Linda Vikdahl's report of her doctoral study conducted in an urban upper secondary school (Vikdahl 2019), tells of young people of different religious backgrounds who found it impossible to discuss their religious perspectives civilly with one another. Her study, which contributes to the ReDi Project on RE and dialogue, based at the University of Hamburg, reports that the teacher had had no training in discussion and dialogue skills. Students expressed various prejudices and displayed their ignorance of other positions, even within their own religion. Moreover, the school – which had only relatively recently become strongly multicultural in intake – had no policy concerning living together respectfully as a school community; the main whole-school focus was on academic achievement. What was especially interesting was that the communities from which the strongly committed religious students came were not themselves engaging in any kind of interfaith dialogue activities (see also Liljestrand 2018 and Lockley-Scott 2019 for further examples of school-based empirical research on religious education conducted, respectively in Sweden and England, as part of the ReDi Project; see Hammer and Schanke 2018 for a recent example of Norwegian school-based research on KRLE).

Clearly, there are many issues to address in the case of Vikdahl's research. One of these is the question of communication between people who live in proximity in different tightly-knit communities, some of whose members are relatively new to life in a liberal democracy. Apart from addressing issues within the school, one wonders what positive effects might have come from collaboration *beyond* the school, by parents and families from different religious and belief backgrounds.

I have moved recently to the city of Leicester, in the East Midlands region of England, described by the *Independent* newspaper in 2013 as 'the most multicultural city on the planet'. A recent book, *Learning to Live Well Together: Case Studies in*

Interfaith Diversity (Wilson and Ravat 2017), presents case studies of such collaboration in Leicester, illustrating how people from diverse religious and ethical backgrounds have learned to live together peacefully and respectfully, despite disagreements in belief and differences in worldview. The book is written by the Director and Deputy Director of the St Philip's Centre which was established as a charity in 2006, with the aim of fostering collaboration among people of different faiths or no faith. The Centre also has partnerships with educational institutions including schools, Leicester's universities, and other academic institutions in the region. Four values underpin the Centre's view of learning to live together, namely *encounter, understanding, trust* and *co-operation*.

The internal diversity of religions is recognised by the St Phillip's Centre and there is an emphasis on 'lived religion'. With regard to the concept of trust, the view is taken, in the Centre's publications, that an acceptance and understanding of diversity within religious traditions can lead to the development of greater *trust* for one another. This concept is preferred to others, such as tolerance and respect. Trust does not imply agreement and the view is taken that constructive disagreement can be a catalyst for co-operation. Importantly, it is recognised that encounter with difference can happen *within* a particular faith community as well as between communities: '…intra-faith encounter may be far more complex' (Wilson and Ravat 2017).

This work is consistent with Lars Laird Iversen's work on 'communities of disagreement' (eg Iversen 2012). In Iversen's view, the aim of religious education is not to achieve consensus. Rather, cohesion might increase because religious education is a forum in which children and young people can learn the necessary skills to live together with disagreements.

Turning to publicly funded schools across England, a few local education authorities still have specialist advisers in religious education who support and enable teachers of the subject in schools. Also, there are bodies and professional associations such as the Religious Education Council of England and Wales which strive, with limited funding, to support RE teachers in schools. I have recently (April 2019) attended the 50th anniversary conference of another professional body, the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, which has for many years brought leading academics, teacher educators and teachers together to provide resources for religious education teachers (Jackson 2019b). However, Shap no longer has the resources or personnel to offer more than to make its materials freely available through its website. Clearly, it is vital that the education ministries of governments recognise the importance of providing adequate levels of funding to support teacher training and practice in the field of religious education, or education about religions and beliefs.

At a European level, the European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education (EFTRE) does valuable work to enable communication and discussion of RE teachers across the continent. But, as Vikdahl's research indicates, individual schools need to have policies related to their own religious and cultural diversity, and mechanisms to support teachers in their work, as well as creating educational links with local communities; they also need to be aware of the resources available to give support. I hope that the publications discussed below, produced under the auspices of Council of

Europe, might be of service to such schools and their teachers of religious and intercultural education in different parts of Europe.

Human Rights: A Core Element or Big Idea for RE?

Next, I will consider the title I was given for my keynote lecture at the Nordic Conference on Religious Education – 'Human rights: a core element or big idea for RE?' First, I will refer to the expression 'big ideas'. The University of Exeter's 'Identifying Principles and Big Ideas for RE' project, based on Barbara Wintersgill's work, aimed to generate criteria to inform and improve curriculum content selection and sequencing in Religious Education (RE) in England (Wintersgill 2018). It recommends organising the RE curriculum around six 'big ideas', areas that pupils are intended to explore in increasing depth at different ages, focusing on religious and non-religious worldviews. The six 'big ideas' are:

1. Continuity, change and diversity (recognising these factors, and debates associated with them, when studying religions and other worldviews);
2. Words and beyond (taking account of modes of verbal and non-verbal communication and expression when studying religions and other worldviews);
3. A good life (the ethical dimension of religions and other worldviews);
4. Making sense of life's experiences (recognising that religions and other worldviews involve deeply felt experiences, some of which may result in personal transformation; engaging in practice within religious or nonreligious groups can bring about a shared sense of identity and belonging);
5. Influence, community, culture and power (exploring how religious and non-religious worldviews interact with wider communities and cultures);
6. The big picture (exploring different understandings of generic religions and worldviews).

Thus, 'big ideas' offers principles to be applied *in the selection and organisation of curriculum material*, offering teachers and teacher educators a useful toolkit. Human rights, in relation to issues concerning religion, could be explored under several of these headings. However, it is clear that 'human rights' is not itself a 'big idea' in the sense used by Barbara Wintersgill and her colleagues.

So, if not a big idea, is 'human rights' a 'core element' of religious education? Collins dictionary defines 'core element' as 'the central, innermost, or most essential part of something'. I would regard the promotion of human rights (and, as I shall argue later, their corresponding human responsibilities) as an important reason for studying religions, and therefore as *a* 'core element' of religious education; but not *the* core element. I would also argue that respecting human rights principles is a necessary condition for the conduct or operation of what I call 'inclusive' RE, that is, a form of religious education that welcomes young people and teachers from a variety of religion and belief backgrounds, and aims to develop knowledge and understanding of religions (and other worldviews), while also offering students opportunities to reflect upon and discuss their learning.

Reasons for Studying Religions/Worldviews

In this next section, I will comment on a variety of reasons for studying religions and other worldviews in schools, including the promotion of human rights and responsibilities.

Recently, I accepted an invitation to compile a book containing a selection of my publications written at different stages of my career (Jackson 2019a). The task proved to be challenging, and it was not easy to decide upon a particular selection of material. The process of assembly of the book took me back over many events in my own career, and prompted some reflection on the development of my ideas about the nature of religious education during my time initially as a teacher in a school, and then as a teacher educator, educational broadcaster and as a researcher working with members of religious communities. All of this experience has involved collaboration with others, whether colleagues or students.

Throughout my career I have also worked as a jazz musician, but I had not considered the relationship between my academic work and my music. It was conversations here at NTNU, with the renowned jazz bass player and music academic Bjørn Alterhaug, which led me to see the connections between my jazz activity and my teaching and research. Alterhaug has written engagingly about the connection between his own academic work and his life as a jazz musician (eg Alterhaug 2016). Looking back over my career, I can now see that the individual and the collective improvisation which takes place in jazz performance is mirrored in my own academic trajectory and close collaboration with others, and in my use of ideas and methods from a variety of academic fields such as religious studies, philosophy, social psychology and social anthropology. As Alterhaug points out, jazz improvisation involves creativity along with the skills of listening to and responding to fellow musicians.

For example, the concept of RE or 'religious education' that I have worked with over many years developed from experience of teaching the subject in school, and then from working as an educator of teachers and as a researcher on different religious and ethnic communities in an English city, as well as making educational programmes for the BBC. All of these experiences involved collaborative work with others. This form of religious education has the fundamental goals both of helping learners to develop an understanding of religions, and also of facilitating students' personal reflection on that experience (see e.g. Jackson 1982). In my first book *Perspectives on World Religions*, which was published in 1978, I presented four groups of arguments in support of this form of RE (Jackson 1978, 3-32). I continue to endorse them.

The first follows from the view that a liberal education should include education about all aspects of human knowledge and experience, and therefore should include education about religion(s). I called this an 'argument from religion', which I summarised as follows:

a) there is a unique area of human experience which can be called 'religion' or a distinctive way in which people make sense out of the world which is 'religious'.

b) elucidation of what 'religion' means requires examination of the range of phenomena which exhibit certain family resemblances, to the extent that they can sensibly be dubbed 'religious'. (Jackson 1978, 3-4)

I presented this argument with reference to the ideas of philosophers of education Paul Hirst and Philip Phenix and to the work of the religious studies scholar Ninian Smart.

The second main argument I called 'the argument from "ultimate questions"'. Drawing on ideas from Paul Tillich, I.T. Ramsey and others, I argued that religious education should be approached through the exploration of basic human questions of meaning – what Paul Tillich called 'ultimate questions' – 'for these ensure the relevance of religious data to the student's life' (Jackson 1978: 5). Later, I extended this argument to include learners' reflection upon their own personal views in relation to their studies of religions and worldviews, introducing the concepts of reflexivity and edification.

The third is really a group of arguments based on an analysis of world society. I linked these arguments to issues concerning international understanding and to various global issues. In articulating these arguments, I referred, in particular, to the work of Robin Richardson and to the World Studies Project, which he directed (Richardson 1976).

The fourth is a group of arguments concerned with living in an increasingly plural society. These include arguments for promoting positive community relations, but also an argument that religious diversity within our societies should be studied because it provides 'fascinating examples of living religions which can be studied at first hand' (Jackson 1978: 11).

I did not relate any of these arguments explicitly to the defence or promotion of human rights and responsibilities, although the arguments related to world society and to living in a plural society relate to democratic values, and therefore to human rights values – a point that I would make later, especially in relation to my work for the Council of Europe, and to which I will return below. Moreover, changing patterns of multiculturalism together with an increase in the use of extreme violence in cases of interreligious and intercultural conflict in European countries, and also in states such as New Zealand and Sri Lanka, show the urgent need for educational programmes which foster interreligious and intercultural understanding.

The Development of the Interpretive Approach

My professional interest in religions, as a lecturer in religious studies, and my interest in children, through my work in teacher education, which involved visiting schools in areas with religiously and culturally mixed populations, developed into collaborative ethnographic research which attracted external funding. Ideas prompted by research findings led to the gradual development of a didactical methodology for religious education which I called the interpretive approach (eg Jackson 1997; 2004). Parents I met in schools in the city of Coventry, in the early 1970s, invited me into their communities and places of worship, and I kept a record of my observations of religious

and family life, initially with members of South Asian families of Hindu background, and I wrote about my experience.

I was contacted by a producer of BBC Educational programmes who had read one of my articles. He asked to visit me and to be shown the area where I was working. The result was an invitation to make radio and radiovision programmes (sound radio synchronised with a colour filmstrip) which involved practice in interviewing technique, script writing, editing and presentation. I was also invited to dramatize some of the stories from scriptures which were told to me by informants at Hindu festivals, such as Holi and Navaratri. Collaborative work with producers, actors and a photographer led to the broadcast of a variety of programmes for school students of different ages, on Hindu communities in Coventry, but also on Sikh, Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, and on themes across religions, such as rites of passage (See Parker, forthcoming 2020).

During this period, I had the good fortune to meet Eleanor Nesbitt who was teaching in Coventry, having returned from working as a teacher in a school in India. Our collaboration led to the eventual formation of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) and the appointment of various staff, some funded by research grants from external sources, as well as to a variety of jointly authored publications (eg Jackson and Nesbitt 1990, 1993).

In terms of methodology, my teaching, broadcasting and field research with colleagues in WRERU raised issues concerned with how religions are represented, with the interpretation of religious material and with issues related to reflecting at a personal level on one's learning or one's research experience. Later, I identified the three concepts of representation, interpretation and reflexivity as central to what I called the interpretive approach to religious education, and to religious education empirical research.

Experiences of research, and teaching related to it, raised methodological questions, which took me to literature on the representation of religions and cultures – notably the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Edward Said. Literature from the phenomenology of religion and then ideas from social anthropology – the writings of Clifford Geertz and Barbara Myerhoff in particular – enabled me to develop work on the interpretation of religious material. Some of this literature, together with other sources including writing by social psychologist Henri Tajfel, enabled me to explore issues related to reflecting upon one's research or one's learning in the field of religions. I did not adopt all the methods and views that I encountered, but rather interacted with them – as Bjørn Alterhaug expressed it – as one jazz musician would respond to another.

Key Concepts of the Interpretive Approach

I offer here a brief summary of the key concepts used in the interpretive approach to religious education, namely the concepts of representation, interpretation and reflexivity.

Representation

Using scholarly material from the history of the portrayal of religion and religions in the West, the interpretive approach deconstructs Western, post-Enlightenment models of representing 'world religions' as schematic belief systems, whose essence can be expressed through a series of propositions or doctrinal statements (Said 1978, 1993; Smith 1978). The approach is equally critical of simplistic representations of cultures and of the relationship between religion and culture. Cultures are seen as dynamic, internally contested and fuzzy edged, while individuals are seen as capable of contributing to the reshaping of culture through making personal syntheses which might draw from a range of cultural resources, including their own ancestral traditions (Jackson 1997).

Religious material is represented through an exploration of the relationship between individuals in the context of their religio-cultural groups and the wider religious tradition to which they relate. The tradition is seen as a tentative 'whole', but the contested nature of that whole is recognised: for example, different insiders (as well as different outsiders) might have varying understandings of the nature and scope of particular religious traditions. The interpretive approach encourages a view of religions which acknowledges their complexity, internal diversity, and their varying interactions with culture. It emphasises the personal element in religions, seeing religion as part of lived human experience. However, the approach is not relativistic with regard to truth, aiming for epistemological openness and acknowledging varying and often competing truth claims (Jackson 1997, 122-6).

Interpretation

Some of the assumptions of 'classical' phenomenology of religion are challenged, especially the view that it is possible to lay aside one's presuppositions and that the use of skills of empathy is unproblematic. Rather than asking learners to leave their presuppositions to one side, the process of interpretation requires a comparison and contrast between the learner's concepts and those of the insider. The approach requires a movement backwards and forwards between the learner's and the insider's concepts and experiences. Sensitivity on the part of the student is important, with genuine empathy only being possible once the 'grammar' of the other's discourse has been understood. The other aspect of this hermeneutical approach lies in *applying* the model of representation outlined above – moving backwards and forwards between individuals in the context of their groups and the wider religious tradition. The two elements overlap in practice.

An understanding of the concept of interpretation was not only influenced by discussions of theory and methodology, but was informed by the research team's own experience of ethnographic fieldwork. Studies of children from a range of different religious backgrounds in Britain were used as a basis for reflection on research methodology and as a direct source of material for use in curriculum development. For example, researchers shared their field notes with curriculum developers in identifying, together, particular events or children's activities that would make valuable material for

children's books. We found ourselves, as a team, writing texts for academic publications at the same time as writing books for use by children in schools.

Reflexivity

There are a number of issues concerning reflexivity – the relationship between the experience of students (or researchers) and the experience of insiders whose way of life they are attempting to interpret. Three aspects of reflexivity emerged as helpful both in the research context and in the classroom.

- the researcher/learner re-assessing her or his understanding of her or his *own* way of life (I used the term 'edification' for this process – see below).
- making a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance.
- developing a running critique of the interpretive process by reviewing methods of study.

All of these have implications for didactics. There needs to be an approach to teaching and learning that encourages reflection and constructive criticism. Clearly, the more teachers are aware of the religious and worldview backgrounds of students, the more sensitive and focused their teaching can be, whether it be through discussion or the design of activities. This approach also requires methods that allow students to gain insight from their peers and to examine different ideas of truth held within the classroom. The 'content' of RE is not simply data provided by the teacher, but includes the knowledge and experience of the participants and an interactive relationship between the two. The specialist religious education teacher working with children from diverse backgrounds needs the professional skill to manage learning that is dialectical. If teachers can have the right degree of sensitivity towards their students' own positions, as well as to the material studied, and can develop appropriate teaching and learning methods, then a genuinely conversational form of RE can take place which can handle diversity.

Edification

One of the key aims of RE is concerned with helping pupils to reflect on their studies of ways of life that are different in some respects from their own. With regard to this, I was impressed by the number of remarks in the anthropological literature in which ethnographers write about how their studies of others have prompted some form of re-assessment of their understanding of their *own* ways of life, or some insight into the human condition in general (eg Leach 1982, 127). Without adopting his post-modernist position, I utilised the terminology of the American philosopher Richard Rorty, who also discusses how one's self-understanding might be deepened by studying other worldviews; thus, I called this form of learning 'edification' (Rorty 1980).

This kind of reflective activity is not separable from the process of interpretation. The interpretive process might start from the insider's language and experience, then move to that of the student, and then oscillate between the two. Thus the activity of grasping another's way of life is inseparable in practice from that of considering the issues and questions raised by it. Such reflective activity is personal to the student.

Teachers cannot delay the process of reflection to a later date, just as they cannot guarantee that it will happen. They can, however, enable it by providing opportunities for reflection. Making this type of connection also often helps to motivate students to participate more fully in RE.

Whatever differences there might appear to be culturally or religiously between the student's way of life and the way of life being studied, there may also be points of contact, points of overlap and points in common. What might appear to be entirely different and 'other' at first glance can end up linking with one's own experience in such a way that new perspectives are created or unquestioned presuppositions are challenged. This seems to be an inevitable product of the interpretive process.

Edification need not only result from studying religions or cultures other than one's own. The study of *one's own* inherited religion or culture can also give new insights in re-examining one's sense of religious identity (Myerhoff 1978). These insights can be applied to religious education and there is the possibility for young people to study a number of religions, including the one of their own ancestry, examined from a new perspective. Ethnographic source material, plus data from locally conducted studies, can provide a basis for this (Jackson 2019a).

Constructive Criticism

Part of the reflexive process is to be able to engage critically with the material studied. The management of this is an important didactical issue, especially in teaching situations that are pluralistic. There is another role for criticism as an element of reflexivity. Just as researchers should spend time reflecting on the effectiveness and the ethics of the methods they have used, so a critique of the interpretive process used in RE can be seen as part of its content. This methodological self-awareness can reveal issues of representation and can also stimulate creative ideas for presenting material studied to others (eg Jackson 1990).

Pupils might change through taking part in the interpretive process. If this could be seen as threatening to some parents, perhaps it is worth considering that children from *any* religious background have to face the encounter of their 'home' way of life and those which constitute the pluralistic, predominantly secular and increasingly globalized society around them. Religious education can present an opportunity for a structured exploration of some of the issues.

Others have used and developed the interpretive approach, taking it in some new directions. For example, Cecilia Eskilsson's research on 'How does an RE teacher-student transform into an RE-teacher to be?' conducted with student teachers at Stockholm University, makes a creative use of the interpretive approach (Eskilsson 2018).

Human Rights and Religious Education

To sum up so far, the interpretive approach to religious education (Jackson 1997), which developed from the various experiences of research and reflection on teaching

described above, can be seen as an attempt to include all participants in the processes of understanding and reflecting on studies of religions and other worldviews in publicly funded schools.

I presented four groups of arguments in support of an open and 'inclusive' form of religious education in publicly funded schools, and summarised the key ideas of the interpretive approach, which developed from researching religious diversity in multicultural settings, and which aimed to respect the human rights of all participants, including those whose religious traditions are studied, as well as those of students and teachers engaging in religious education.

I will now discuss human rights and responsibilities as they bear on the experience of working in the field of religious education teacher training and research described above.

Human rights are especially relevant to the third and fourth groups of arguments mentioned earlier – those based on an analysis of world society and those concerned with living in an increasingly plural society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18 states:

> *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his (sic) religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.* (United Nations 1948)

Human rights are also relevant to arguments supporting the view that parents should be able to guide their children as they grow up, in a family environment which reflects their beliefs and values. Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms respect for the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their children, as they grow up together, with the right of every child to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion (United Nations 1990). Thus, it is important to maintain a dialogue involving those working in 'inclusive religious education' and what are sometimes called forms of 'faith-based education'. It is also important to recognise that students from religious backgrounds and/or with personal religious commitments are very likely to be present in the classrooms of 'inclusive' schools. Moreover, 'inclusive religious education' should provide opportunities for students to meet and engage with members of religious communities (Jackson 2014a, 87-97), a point discussed and illustrated well by research studies from Norway and Sweden conducted by Thérèse Halvarson Britton and Camilla Stabel Jørgensen (Britton and Jørgensen 2018).

Rights and Responsibilities

It should be noted that a criticism, which claims Western bias in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, concerns the relationship between human rights and responsibilities or duties. In terms of 'dialogue' with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is worth reviewing the Universal Declaration of Human

Responsibilities, published by the InterAction Council (1997), an independent international organisation drawing on the experience of a group of former heads of state or government, originally chaired by Helmut Schmidt. Here, the Western social and historical context of the Universal Declaration is recognised, and some attempt is made at an accommodation between 'East' and 'West'. The Declaration of Human Responsibilities states:

> *...many societies have traditionally conceived of human relations in terms of obligations rather than rights. This is true, in general terms, for instance, for much of Eastern thought. While traditionally in the West, at least since the 17th Century age of enlightenment, the concepts of freedom and individuality have been emphasized, in the East, the notions of responsibility and community have prevailed. The fact that a Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted instead of a Universal Declaration of Human Duties undoubtedly reflects the philosophical and cultural background of the document's drafters who, as is known, represented the Western powers who emerged victorious from the Second World War.* (InterAction Council 1997)

The Declaration goes on to say:

> *Because rights and duties are inextricably linked, the idea of a human right only makes sense if we acknowledge the duty of all people to respect it. Regardless of a particular society's values, human relations are universally based on the existence of both rights and duties.*

Examples of responsibilities or obligations in relation to rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities include the following:

> *If we have a right to be educated, then we have the obligation to learn as much as our capabilities allow us and, where possible, share our knowledge and experience with others*
>
> *If we have a right to benefit from the earth's bounty, then we have the obligation to respect, care for and restore the earth and its natural resources.*

In the context of the inclusive religious education classroom, it is important to add responsibility to take the religious views of others seriously and to respect their right to hold them. This responsibility extends to the employment of appropriate didactical strategies, including fostering sensitivity to others while trying to understand their religious stances, including their meaning and use of religious language (Jackson 1997).

The Council of Europe

As indicated above, in my work with colleagues in Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, we drew on research experience with children and families from diverse backgrounds in developing the interpretive approach to religious education. We were concerned with fairness and inclusivity, but we did not refer explicitly to the concept of human rights in relation to our work. In 2002, I was invited to participate in a meeting at the Council of Europe, based in Strasbourg, France, at which specialists in education at the Council of Europe turned their attention for the first time to the study of religions in schools.

The Council of Europe, founded in 1949, was established specifically as a human rights organisation, following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It currently has 47 member states. The Council of Europe aims to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law and to seek solutions to problems such as xenophobia. The Council of Europe also aims to promote awareness and development of Europe's cultural identity *and* its cultural diversity. The Council of Europe includes the Parliamentary Assembly, consisting of representatives from the national parliaments of member states, and the Committee of Ministers, composed of the Foreign Ministers of member states. The Committee of Ministers makes Recommendations to member states based on projects conducted within the Council of Europe. The European Court of Human Rights is also part of the Council of Europe.

Educational Work

The Council of Europe's educational activity focuses on human rights, democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe 2010, 2013). Related to these are topics such as language, history and, from 2002, religion. The reason why the Council of Europe did not include study of religions prior to 2002 was *not* an anti-religious stance, but application of the French principle of laïcité, adopting a position of state neutrality towards religions, and also regarding religion as a private concern. The Council of Europe made a decisive change to its policy on this issue, and introduced studies of religions into its educational programme. Now, as a public political institution (Habermas 2006), the Council of Europe maintains a position of impartiality in relation to religions. This is a secular (descriptive, impartial) and not a secularist (normative, anti-religious) stance.

The term 'religious education' is not used by the Council of Europe, and its documents use expressions such as 'the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue'. There was no intention in using this expression to *reduce* religion to culture (Jackson 2014a, 21-22.). Religion described as a 'cultural fact' attempts to recognise the presence of religions in society in a way that can be affirmed by everyone, regardless of background or viewpoint.

Religions and Education

The decision to include studies of religions in the Council of Europe's educational work was made at a meeting in Strasbourg in September 2002, which I was invited to attend. The events of September 11, 2001 in the United States had galvanised the Council of Europe into action, and a working party was established which identified '…strengthening intercultural and inter-religious dialogue…' as a priority for Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2003).

Following the September meeting, the Council of Europe launched a project, 'The Challenge of Intercultural Education Today: Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe' (Council of Europe 2003). Its rationale included: 'preparing all citizens and especially young people to take part in intercultural dialogue, including in its religious aspects', which 'needs to be integrated, in a professional and thorough way, with the

social and personal development missions of education in multicultural societies…'. Adding the dimension of religion 'requires revisiting and updating the concept of intercultural education in general, to ensure that all education contributes harmoniously to the four pillars of education for the twenty first century outlined in the Delors Report' (Council of Europe 2003). This direct connection to the pillars of the Delors Report – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (UNESCO 1996) – shows that the project's rationale included both considering knowledge about religions to be intrinsically worthwhile and personally relevant to learners, and included much more than an aim to increase tolerance. Thus reverberations between the Council of Europe's view and our on-going work in Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit were very evident to me.

Having accepted an invitation to participate in the Council of Europe's work on religions and education, I was asked to attend a meeting held in Paris in mid-2003, bringing together a working group of specialists in religious education and intercultural education from across Europe. Subsequently I was invited to contribute to a Europe-wide conference on 'The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education' held in Oslo in June 2004 (Council of Europe 2004). This conference was hosted by Gunnar Mandt, who worked in the Ministry of Education in Norway, and who represented the Minister of Education of Norway at the Council of Europe. I had the pleasure of working with him, initially at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and later at the European Wergeland Centre in Oslo (see below). I was also invited to be part of a working group which included specialists in religious education and intercultural education from different parts of Europe, together with a scholar from a Canadian university, Canada being an observer state of the Council of Europe. The group included Peter Schreiner, Director of the Comenius Institute in Münster, Germany, and Heid Leganger-Krogstad, who then worked at Oslo University College (now Oslo Metropolitan University) and later moved to the Norwegian School of Theology (MF), also based in Oslo.

In addition to this work, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights brought together representatives from different religions in Europe to discuss how, from a human rights perspective, teaching about religions could be developed in publicly-funded schools across Europe. These representatives of religions gave their support to the idea of developing teaching about religious diversity in public schools in Europe.

To acknowledge 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the Council of Europe published a *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: Living Together as Equals in Dignity* (Council of Europe 2008). This includes summaries of some Council of Europe work up to that point on religions and education.

Exchanges on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue

In April 2008, representatives of European religion and belief organisations were brought together in Strasbourg, to meet Council of Europe representatives and experts. This was the first in a series of annual 'Exchanges' on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. I was asked to co-organise the programme with Professor Marianna Shakhnovich of the Saint-Petersburg State University, and Council of Europe

staff. Participants were given a written overview of relevant declarations and projects. The meeting aimed to clarify the rationale for the participation of religious bodies in the Council of Europe's public educational work, identifying possible developments. The report on the meeting noted the offer by religious communities of public support for the Council of Europe's work, their giving theological and ethical reasons for valuing an impartial study of religions in schools, and their concern that media portrayals of religions needed to be addressed educationally (Jackson 2008, 2019a).

Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education

Following the initial 2002 meeting, a team had been assembled to prepare a handbook for educators across Europe. *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education* was published in 2007 as the main outcome of the project (Keast 2007). Part 1 considers the theoretical and conceptual basis for studying religious diversity and Part 2 deals with topics such as creating safe space for dialogue; examples of didactical approaches to teaching about religions are given. Part 3 considers broad questions, including issues of ethos and policy, while Part 4 shares examples of current practice from some member states.

A European Education Centre

A second initiative, taken in 2006, was discussion of the possible development of a European Education Centre dealing with citizenship, human rights and intercultural education. There had also been a proposal (following consultations with European religious bodies) for consideration of the establishment of a Centre focusing on religious education. I was commissioned to write a report concerning the scope of, and feasibility for, a new Education Centre.

My report (Jackson 2006) argued a case for developing an interdisciplinary Centre dealing with the educational application of the Council of Europe's core values, and including studies of religious diversity. I argued that an interdisciplinary Centre would give greater integration, visibility and impact to the work of the Council of Europe in its central fields, together with education about religious diversity and intercultural education. The report was accepted by the Committee of Ministers.

The Norwegian Government offered to fund the Centre, and to govern it in collaboration with the Council of Europe. Thus, in 2008, the European Wergeland Centre (EWC) was established and was inaugurated in Oslo on 29 May 2009. The conference included keynote presentations from Jan Egeland, Director of the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Institute, and Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe. I was invited to speak about the development of the Centre idea and its potential contribution.

The EWC was initially based at Oslo University College. I was invited to take up a Visiting Professorship at Oslo University College, with a brief to help to develop the Centre's work in relation to religious diversity and education. The EWC now has its own premises in Oslo. Its 10th anniversary was celebrated in Oslo in October 2018, with speakers including the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn

Jagland, a former Norwegian Prime Minister. The EWC now aims to serve education professionals, researchers, civil society, policymakers, parents and students across Europe. Its website includes access to free 'library' materials, including a range of translations of the book *Signposts* (Jackson 2014) (http://www.theewc.org/).

The 2008 Recommendation

Some members of the Council of Europe project team, including myself, worked with the Committee of Ministers to develop a Recommendation for use by member states in managing religious diversity in schools. During its development, the Committee of Ministers decided to include non-religious convictions alongside religions. The final Recommendation was published in December 2008, and circulated to member states. The form of education suggested is suitable for 'inclusive' schools and is complementary to more open forms of faith-based education (Jackson 2019a). It acknowledges diversity and complexity and encourages positive relations with parents and religious communities, as well as organisations relating to non-religious philosophies. The Recommendation does not adopt a theologically pluralistic view nor does it present a secular humanist view. The emphasis is on knowledge, skills and attitudes that build *competence*. The Recommendation advocates high-quality teacher training, rich and varied resources, and on-going research and evaluation.

Signposts: A Project on Disseminating the Recommendation

To facilitate the use of the Recommendation, the Council of Europe and European Wergeland Centre set up a joint committee in 2010 to help policymakers and practitioners to utilise its ideas in their own national settings. A questionnaire, designed by the committee, was distributed to Education Ministries in the 47 member states, asking respondents to identify difficulties in their country in applying the 2008 Recommendation.

Analysis of questionnaire responses identified some common issues, notably:

- ambiguity/lack of clarity in terminology;
- a need to understand the component elements of 'competence' for understanding religions;
- how to make the classroom a 'safe space' for dialogue;
- how to help students to analyse media representations of religions;
- how to integrate a study of non-religious worldviews with the study of religions;
- how to tackle human rights issues in relation to religion and belief;
- how to link schools to wider religion/belief communities and organisations in order to increase students' knowledge and understanding.

I was asked to write a book – published as *Signposts* – on behalf of the committee, taking account of its deliberations, and drawing on relevant research, and good practice (Jackson 2014a).

Signposts was regarded by Committee of Ministers as particularly relevant to its Declaration against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism, issued

in 2015 (Council of Europe 2015a), together with its associated Action Plan (Council of Europe 2015b). However, it does not follow from the fact that *Signposts* is considered relevant to education related to issues concerning extremism that the book was produced *only* to promote tolerance. As indicated above, *Signposts* also contributed to a view of education valuing knowledge for its own sake, as well as skills of communication, and personal reflection on their learning by students (UNESCO 1996).

Criticisms of the Council of Europe

The work of the Council of Europe in relation to religions, including its work on education about religions, has been strongly criticised by one writer (Arthur 2011). He makes the following claims:

The Council of Europe 'has adopted a position of secular humanism' (2011, 77) and promotes 'an antireligious form of secular liberalism' (2011, 78)

The Council of Europe is 'reducing religion to merely a "cultural fact"' (2011, 76)

'Since all religions are accorded equal status in the Council's dialogue, religious claims and ways of life appear to escape any test of truth.' (2011, 75)

Notions of equality, tolerance, democracy and human rights in society 'are culturally contingent alternatives that compete against other visions of the human good, such as religions, which claim transcendent authority'. (2011, 78)

I will make a brief, summary response to these claims:

A democratic institution, such as the Council of Europe, is 'secular', only in a *descriptive* sense, in that its function is not to make judgements about the truth or falsity of religious claims, which are a matter of belief and faith, and not of publicly shared and agreed knowledge. The Council of Europe is not normatively secular*ist* nor does it, as an institution, adopt a normative stance of secular humanism.

There might be tensions between certain moral claims of some religious believers and the values that underpin the Council of Europe, if those claims contradict human rights principles. However, religions are internally diverse, and many people from a wide variety of religious backgrounds fundamentally support human rights (eg Küng 1998; Sahin 2014; Sharma 2004; Williams 2013, World Parliament of Religions 1993). There is no reason why there cannot be constructive dialogue involving representatives of religions, representatives of secular philosophies and representatives of the Council of Europe. As indicated above, such dialogue has been part of the Council of Europe's activity.

The assumption that, within the Council of Europe and its work on religion and education, religions 'escape any test of truth', and therefore are regarded as equally true, is simply false. The Council of Europe takes the view that individuals have the right to hold particular religious or non-religious beliefs. On the basis of human rights principles, it recognises that there may be profound disagreements among individuals with regard to religious truth claims, but it encourages those who disagree to exchange and interact with one another in a civil manner.

The Council of Europe's latest educational project, 'Free to Speak: Safe to Learn', continues its policy of promoting dialogue in the classroom, based on human rights principles (see https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn).

Dialogical Liberalism

In supporting the idea of discussion about the interpretation of human rights, I have proposed a position of 'dialogical liberalism', utilising John Rawls' concepts of 'overlapping consensus' and 'political liberalism' (Rawls 1993). This allows some flexibility for the discussion of human rights in different cultural and religious contexts (Jackson 2019a, Chapter 12). In putting 'dialogical liberalism' into practice, care needs to be taken not to suppress disagreement, or to oppose all alternative perspectives – including conservative religious positions. In putting 'dialogical liberalism' into practice, it needs to be recognised that the limits of 'political liberalism' lie, not with disagreement, but with those in society who deny the basic liberal rights of citizens, or refuse to tolerate conflicting comprehensive views – in other words, those who reject the idea of 'political liberalism' itself. 'Political liberalism' allows non-liberal positions to be held, provided they do not seek to suppress alternative views. As far as possible, the state's response should be to promote discussion and dialogue, seeking what John Rawls calls 'overlapping consensus' except in clearly extreme cases, including those causing harm to others. At the level of social and political interaction within a society, basic human rights provide a set of provisional moral principles, derived from reflecting on the idea of democracy, relevant to dialogue between those with different religious or cultural perspectives. Such 'dialogical liberalism' is implicit in the Council of Europe's work on intercultural dialogue, and in its policy of encouraging users to work *with* Council of Europe recommendations in their own national contexts, treating them as tools for discussion and development, rather than regarding them as rigid directives.

The Signposts International Research Network

The *Signposts* International Research Network (SIRN) is a group of European researchers and curriculum developers concerned to improve the quality of religious and worldview education in schools, who are engaging in independent research projects, but whose work also addresses issues identified by education ministries in Council of Europe member states, and reported in *Signposts* (Jackson 2014) (http://www.theewc.org/Content/What-we-do/Other-ongoing-projects/Signposts-International-Research-Network-SIRN).

SIRN currently includes researchers from the UK, Sweden and Norway who are conducting school-based research projects on classroom religious and worldview education, and others who are engaged in curriculum development related to such research. The researchers have worked in pairs to report their research studies, each of which addresses a key issue identified in *Signposts*, in a recent edition of the journal *Intercultural Education* (Berglund and Gent 2018; Bråten and Everington 2018; Britton and Jørgensen 2018; Flensner and Von der Lippe (2018); Jackson and O'Grady (2018);

Johannessen and Skeie (2018); see also O'Grady and Jackson (2019)). The curriculum developers include colleagues based at the European Wergeland Centre in Oslo who have produced a teacher training module which will be published on the European Wergeland Centre website later in 2019.

Conclusion

To sum up, I began this article by referring to the changing political context in the West, noting the increasing complexity of multicultural societies and some consequences of this for schools, pointing to the need for collaborative action in addressing issues of living together, despite disagreements and differences in worldview, and noting the value of Iversen's concept of 'communities of disagreement' together with the values underpinning the St Philip's Centre's view of learning to live together, namely *encounter*, *understanding*, *trust* and *co-operation*. Such collaborations need to operate beyond, as well as within, schools. In the case of schools, there needs to be access to support and ideas outside the school, including at national and international levels.

Next, I considered the title I was given for my keynote lecture at the Nordic Conference on RE, noting the value of 'big ideas' in offering principles for the selection and organisation of curriculum material for RE, but also noting that 'human rights' is not itself a 'big idea' in the sense used by the Exeter team.

I then reviewed reasons for studying religious and worldview diversity in public schools, looking back at my own earlier work on this. The arguments included the need to understand religion as part of broad human experience, to consider fundamental or 'ultimate' questions raised by religions, to understand world society, and also to understand our own plural societies. A consideration of human rights was viewed as relevant to these arguments.

I went on to relate the emergence of the interpretive approach to religious education from our research at Warwick in schools and communities, and summarised its key concepts of representation, interpretation, reflexivity and edification. I then discussed human rights especially in relation to arguments for 'inclusive' RE based on an analysis of world society and with living in plural societies., noting the value of providing opportunities for students to meet and engage with members of religious communities, as exemplified in the interpretive approach.

Then I introduced the work of the Council of Europe which focused on the religious dimension of intercultural education, developing its approach on a foundation of human rights, and traced the establishment of the European Wergeland Centre, summarising a project on religions and education culminating in the publication of the book *Signposts.*

The work of the *Signposts* International Research Network, in applying human rights principles in educational contexts, was referred to, including the publication of a special issue of the journal *Intercultural Education* reporting research studies which have focused on issues raised in *Signposts*.

Finally, I emphasised the need for researchers to engage collaboratively with teachers in school-based research as especially important to the promotion of human rights values in educational contexts. Such collaboration parallels group cohesion and improvisation in the performance of jazz music.

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