

## **Promoting Religious Tolerance and Non-discrimination in Schools: A European Perspective**

### **Abstract**

The treatment of religious diversity and religious tolerance in schools, a vital element in the democratic concern for education and religion, involves a range of issues, including that of pedagogy. Promoting religious tolerance and non-discrimination in the school context covers more than the content of the curriculum or issues related to teaching and learning. The promotion (or non-promotion) of religious tolerance and non-discrimination is also related to school context and ethos, leadership and management, external relations and the school's relationship with the community. It is not possible to refer to all of these domains in this article. However, before focusing specifically on issues related to pedagogy, a number of points will be made about: the scope of 'school education in religion', different types of state funded schools, the stakeholders in formulating policy and designing syllabuses and the nature of religious plurality. The article concludes with some points about research in Europe in the field of education and religion.

### **The scope of 'school education in religion'**

In the curriculum, a discrete religious education or study of religions is central to the issue of promoting religious tolerance. However, religion may also be covered in other parts of the curriculum in subjects such as history, in thematic fields such as citizenship education (Jackson 2003) and intercultural education (Council of Europe 2004a; Perotti 1994).

### **Citizenship Education**

Clearly various forms of citizenship education or civic education can be used as vehicles to explore issues of religious diversity and religious discrimination. However, European projects on citizenship education have not given close attention to religious issues (Council of Europe, 2004b). Fortunately, an important Council of Europe project on intercultural education – a field often seen as a subset of education for democratic citizenship – does focus directly on the religious dimension of that field (Council of Europe, 2004a). A handbook for teachers, written by contributors to this project, will be available from the Council of Europe in 2006 or 2007. Some general points about the relationship between religious education and citizenship education in Europe are made in Jackson and Steele (2005), while broader issues relating to citizenship and religious diversity in an international educational context are discussed in Jackson (2003).

To take a specific national example, that of England and Wales, where citizenship was introduced into the national curriculum for secondary schools in September 2002, knowledge and understanding of religious diversity is seen as an important element in promoting social cohesion.

The national curriculum for citizenship for pupils aged 11-16 requires knowledge and understanding of 'the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a). In addition, the non-statutory advice for primary schools (ages 5-11) encourages children to 'appreciate the range of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom' (DfEE/QCA 1999b).

These are not easy tasks, and the teaching of such fields needs some expertise from teachers with a knowledge and understanding of the debates about religion, culture and ethnicity. The critique of early work in multicultural education in the 1970s by antiracist writers (for instance, Troyna, 1983) shows the very real dangers of superficial treatment of this topic, of giving a simplistic portrayal of 'cultures', and of inadvertently manufacturing stereotypical identities and conferring them on young people. Ethnographic research in various religious settings has also pointed to the complexity of identity formation in relation to religion, ethnicity and culture as well as the contestability of these concepts (Baumann, 1996; Jackson, 2003, 2004a; Jackson and Nesbitt, 1993; Jacobson, 1998; Nesbitt, 2000; Østberg, 2003). Applying insights from such scholarship and research to the representation of European Islam is but one important task in promoting religious tolerance and understanding (Jackson 2003, Chapter 1)

It is too early to evaluate the impact of citizenship education in England and Wales, or whether its coverage of issues of religious diversity is effective. However, initial responses from teachers of religious education are available. In England and

Welsh secondary schools, some elements of citizenship education can be offered through other subjects such as religious education or history. Some religious education teachers have expressed a concern that their subject will be eroded through addressing citizenship issues and that, gradually, citizenship will 'take over' while RE declines. Other teachers of RE see their contribution to citizenship as a genuine opportunity to contribute expertise to an area that has been neglected and to work collaboratively with teachers of other subjects who have little understanding of issues connected with religion (Blaylock, 2003). Some good examples of developments relevant to both religious and citizenship education will be given later (for instance, Iprgrave, 2003; O'Grady, 2005).

### **Management, Governance and School Policy**

As well as dealing with issues of religious diversity in the curriculum, there is a need to consider school policies on religious discrimination and the mechanisms schools might introduce to eliminate it. It would be pointless to have a form of religious education or intercultural education that promotes religious tolerance and non-discrimination whilst having wider school policies that ignore or even work against them. There is some evidence from research in Britain that schools can be perceived by children and parents as a source of religious discrimination (Weller, Feldman and Purdam, 2001).

It is interesting that the current educational policy of the British Humanist Association (BHA) includes support for provision by common schools for religious holidays and for designated spaces for optional prayer and worship and for optional faith based teaching by different religious groups. The policy also promotes the idea of more respect for and flexibility on other cultural and religious requirements on such matters such as school uniform, food, and sex and relationships education and an inclusive religious education for *all* pupils designed to give an understanding of the range of beliefs found in a pluralist society (BHA, 2002).

Clearly then, issues such as school management, governance and relationships with parents and communities need to be considered as well as those of the curriculum.

### **Types of State Funded Schools**

Next, we need to think about the types of schools that would be dealing with issues of religious tolerance and non discrimination. Currently there are some western democratic societies that exclude any form of religious education from the curriculum of common schools (for instance, France, with the exception of Alsace and Lorraine). At the moment, education to promote tolerance and non-discrimination with regard to religion would have to be dealt with in France, for example, in

subjects such as history or thematic fields such as intercultural education. Others have some form of multifaith or integrative religious education in the common school (for instance, England and Wales, Scotland, Norway). Others have various types of faith based schooling in which religious education is taught from a 'confessional' perspective (for instance, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Spain). Of course, there is a relativity in the way in which the identity of Christian schools is conceived, even in countries of Western Europe (De Wolff, Miedema & De Ruyter, 2002), and, as Friedrich Schweitzer points out, a distinction has to be made between confessional schools that have the intention of transmitting particular beliefs and a confessional system that provides a context for more autonomous learning (Schweitzer, 2006).

Faith based schools face particular challenges in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination towards those of other faiths, and even sometimes towards some members of their own religion. The British Humanist Association's view on faith-based schools is that they 'doubt that religious schools can be inclusive and accommodating' with regard to countering religious discrimination, and BHA policy is to 'propose that religious schools are phased out by absorption into a reformed community [i.e. common] school system' (BHA, 2002, p. 16). Is it the case, however, that faith based schools cannot be committed to the promotion of understanding and tolerance of other religions and cultures?

Little research has been done in Britain on the degree to which faith based schools deal effectively with religious and cultural diversity. Of that available, research on state funded Jewish schools in Britain shows that the most conservative schools theologically tend to be those that avoid joint projects with schools of other types and avoid or fail to see the importance of multicultural or multi-religious education. It is these schools that construct the tightest educational boundaries in attempting to form and institutionalize identity. For example, strictly Orthodox schools monitor teaching materials and may censor topics such as Zionism or the theory of evolution. They, also, are likely to have the most exclusive ethos statements and the tightest admissions arrangements (Valins, 2000; Valins *et al.*, 2001). Short and Lenga's (2002) research on Jewish primary schools reveals a diversity of practice, with some Orthodox schools 'less than enthusiastic about engaging in multicultural education' (p. 49). Their research report associates positive attitudes to multiculturalism and towards other faiths with the more liberal end of the theological spectrum:

The most positive attitudes were found among spokespersons for the three progressive schools in the survey, and it may be no coincidence that it was one of these schools

that published the only prospectus containing a reference to teaching about other faiths. While the schools that were indifferent or hostile to multiculturalism were, in all cases, orthodox, there is no warrant for assuming that such schools are uniformly unsympathetic to multicultural education. (Short and Lenga, 2002, p. 53)

Until recently, faith based schools in England and Wales could choose whether or not to include studies of religious and cultural diversity in the curriculum - whether in religious education or elsewhere. However, the introduction of citizenship education into the national curriculum in England and Wales in September 2002 has placed on *all* state funded secondary schools (including faith based schools) a clear requirement to explore with pupils the nature of Britain as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. As already noted, at Key Stage 4 (age 14-16), pupils have to study 'the origins and implications of the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding...' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, Citizenship ks4 1b). Future research should reveal whether any schools seek to avoid this obligation.

### **Who has the right to represent religions in policy and practice?**

A further important issue concerns the stakeholders in religious education and their roles in influencing policies and designing syllabuses. For example, when the so-called model syllabuses for religious education in the common (community) school in England and Wales were produced in the early 1990s, members of religious groups had control over the content of syllabuses while professional educators dealt with pedagogy and didactics only after the content had been decided. The result was a heavily content-dominated syllabus, with the diversity of each tradition filtered out and with little space for reflective and critical engagement by pupils. This case illustrates the issues of who should construct syllabuses, of the involvement professional educators in determining what is included and of attention to research in pedagogy and didactics.

The views and responses of children are also important - especially their motivations concerning the study of religions - and the examples of dialogical approaches given below put children very much at the centre. Increasingly, educators point to children's rights as an issue in religious education. As Friedrich Schweitzer and Reinhold Boschki point out:

It is easy to see that the question of children's rights is of immediate importance for the debates about RE and about the different ways

in which RE can be institutionalized. Given the growing awareness of the need to respect children's views, educators and politicians should include them in their decisions about the preferred model of RE as well. It is no longer legitimate to make such decisions without reference to the needs of children. (Schweitzer and Boschki, 2002, p. 34)

Moreover, there are issues over parental rights. In the U.K., for example, the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into national law raises the issue of parental rights in relation to faith based education. The Human Rights Act (1998) states:

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. (Schedule 1, Part II, Article 2)

The Human Rights Act has already been used to support the parental rights argument, by a politician while she was Secretary of State for Education and Skills<sup>i</sup> and by others who support state funding for religious schools (eg Felderhof 2000).<sup>ii</sup>

Other commentators deal with wider aspects of religious education and human rights. For example, Liam Gearon considers the implications of a concern for human rights for religious education, partly deriving from the Human Rights Act in the UK and from other international codes or legislation. He draws on postcolonial theory in arguing that religious education needs to take more account of the political implications of teaching and learning in the representation of religious traditions. In particular, he argues for a heightened awareness and practical implementation of human rights education within the subject. This involves not only examining the positive contributions of religious people to human rights, but also the role of religious traditions and religious people in the denial of human rights 'especially in the repression of women and indigenous peoples, a process particularly notable in the history of imperialism' (Gearon, 2002).

### **The nature of religious plurality**

Next, approaches to religion that promote tolerance and non-discrimination with regard to freedom of religion or belief need to take account of the nature of religious plurality in late modern societies. This discussion also raises issues about culture in relation to religion, nationality and ethnicity. Theoretical frameworks that take account of current debates are needed as a basis for practical work in didactics and curriculum development together with empirical research that could inform

policy and practice. One framework (based on theoretical discussion and some empirical research) for an intercultural education that incorporates religious diversity makes use of the concepts of plurality and pluralism (Jackson, 2004a; Skeie, 1995). 'Plurality' is a descriptive concept. The term 'pluralism', however, is reserved for ideological or normative views about plurality. Through exploring religious and cultural plurality, students will be enabled to form their own views on pluralism at both the social level and the level of individual identity. Traditional plurality is the plurality of overt ethnic and religious diversity in societies. There is a very visible Turkish and Muslim minority in Germany, and Bengali, Pakistani and Indian Muslim minorities in Britain as well as Punjabi Sikhs, Hindus and Christians, Gujarati Hindus and Muslims etc. Some conflicts in European countries have also been based on traditional ethnic distinctions and boundaries. Some views of intercultural/multicultural education and religious education operate more or less exclusively with this concept.

'Modern plurality' embraces the forces of secularisation and the range of influences afforded by instant electronic communication by the internet and email, satellite television, easy international travel (for some at least) and the globalisation of industry and commerce. One might add the academic re-visiting of established views in disciplines such as history. Modern plurality accounts for multiple influences on individual identity, the erosion of traditional cultural boundaries and a tendency towards relativity in relation to truth claims, for example in the sphere of religion.

The two dimensions interact both at social and individual levels. The diversity of theologies within Christianity, from very traditional expressions of various kinds to Christian, atheist, postmodern 'theologies', an emergence of eclectic new religious movements alongside returns to more traditional belief and practice and the rise of inter-faith initiatives are all examples at the social level.

At the individual level, a second or third generation British young woman from a Gujarati Hindu background may draw on traditional cultural and religious resources, but also draw on a much wider range of influences in shaping her own identity. Viewed as a member of her family tradition, in the context of the home, she might be represented as part of the Hindu 'community'. Viewed from the context of the peer group (in school or university) she would be seen to have a much more complex personal identity. Social scientists and educators use terms such as cultural hybridity, multiple cultural competence and integrated plural identity in attempting to describe these forms of cultural development. For example, ethnographic research on Pakistani Muslim children in Oslo shows them

to feel *both* Pakistani and Norwegian in representing their own identities, identifying strongly with local places in Oslo and Pakistan (villages and towns where relatives live), and with an Islamic identity that is in some ways accommodating to Western democratic institutions. They also have a sense of citizenship that is transcultural - recognising cultural diversity as a condition for the development of shared citizenship values (Østberg 2003).

Pedagogies and methods of teaching and learning are needed that allow young people to explore their own identities in relation to cultural source material, including information specifically about religions. Approaches grounded in an exploration of plurality and pluralism would include *all* students in studying culture (including its religious aspects) in relation to their own sense of identity. The goal of including both dialogue between people of different faiths and between believers and non-believers could be attained in this way.

### **Examples of Pedagogies**

With regard to pedagogy and didactics in relation to religion, there is a need to employ methods that take account of wider debates about culture, nationality, ethnicity and human rights and, crucially, that engage students by connecting with their personal experience and concerns. The following examples are of pedagogical approaches developed in relation to the common school, or, in the case of Weisse, the confessional school within a liberal system of religious education.

#### *The interpretive approach*

The interpretive approach employs a flexible model which encourages an exploration of the relationship between individuals in relation to religio-cultural groups to which they might belong, using elements of the wider religious tradition as reference points (Jackson, 1997; 2004a and b). The tradition is seen as a broad context, but the contested nature of the 'whole' is recognized: for example, different insiders (as well as different outsiders) might have varying understandings of the nature and scope of, say, the Christian or Hindu traditions. The model encourages a view of religions which acknowledges their complexity, internal diversity, permeable boundaries and their varying interactions with culture. It especially emphasizes the personal element in religions, seeing religion as part of lived human experience. However, the approach is not relativistic with regard to truth, acknowledging varying and often competing truth claims.

One element of this interpretive approach is the application of a model of representation - moving backwards and forwards between case studies of individuals in the context of their groups and

aspects of the wider religious tradition so that each can illuminate and inform the other. The method also requires a comparison and contrast between the learner's concepts and those of the insider, with some comparison and contrast between the learner's and the insider's concepts and experiences.<sup>iii</sup>

The pedagogy of the approach encourages reflection and constructive criticism. The reflective element provides time for learners to re-assess their understanding of their *own* ways of life as a result of their studies, while the critical element enables pupils to make constructive criticisms at a distance and to contribute to critical reviews of methods of study. Clearly, the more the teacher is aware of the religious and ideological backgrounds of students, the more sensitive and focused the teaching can be. Methods are also needed that encourage students to gain insight from their peers and to examine different ideas of truth held within the classroom. Lesson 'content' is not simply data provided by the teacher, but includes the knowledge and experience of the participants and an interactive relationship between the two. 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 strategies, then a genuinely conversational form of education can take place which can handle diversity. Indeed, in some contexts, where racism is a problem, for example, there is a strong case for starting with students' own assumptions, awakening their awareness to their own conditioning about the nature of cultures, religions and ethnic groups.

The interpretive approach allows learning to *begin* at any point on the hermeneutic circle. For example, it could start with an overview of key concepts, if that suited the needs of a class, or it could start with the experiences and assumptions of class members.

#### *Dialogical Approaches*

I shall summarise three dialogical approaches developed by Ipgrave in England, Leganger-Krogstad in Norway, and Weisse and his team in Germany. These all emphasize dialogue in the classroom, in which the pupils are the starting point as well as the key resources and actors (see Jackson, 2004a, Chapter 7).

Julia Ipgrave, in her Leicester primary school with an 85 per cent Muslim majority, has conducted research on children's influence upon one another and introduced strategies to promote dialogue and communication between children from different religious and non-religious backgrounds within and beyond the school (Ipgrave, 2001; 2003). Her research identifies shifting boundaries between groups of children, which at times might be reinforced through conflict. On other occasions, boundaries are crossed as children filter and re-

work one another's religious languages in formulating their own ideas. Ipgrave's work illustrates that, in plural contexts, children are able to draw on a variety of religio-cultural resources in addition to their parental traditions in creating their own culture (cf Jackson, 1997, Chapter 4). Ipgrave's analysis of children's language illustrates graphically how these processes occur in her school - through interaction with others, reflection on others' language and meanings, and through disagreement with or through the adaptation or adoption of others' words. Ipgrave's on-going work is seminal in appreciating the potential of RE in the state-funded school as a site for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and interaction, and provides an alternative model to that envisaged by Hargreaves (1994), in which key adults are seen as the representatives of religious groups in dialogue and negotiation with others. It also demonstrates that 'multifaith' religious education can be done successfully with children of primary age. Her research on dialogue opens up possibilities for using the experience of children in school as source material for religious education. One element of this, which is being developed further in a series of projects, is the linking of children from different schools together by email in order to participate in dialogue (Ipgrave 2001, 27-31; 2005). This work includes contact between children in fully state-funded community schools and others in faith-based schools. There is potential here for increasing understanding across different worldviews and for reducing the negative effects of separate religious schooling.

Leganger-Krogstad's contextual approach was developed through her research and work in teacher training in Northern Norway in an area with both Sami and Finnish (Kven) minorities, together with a 'hidden' Sami culture within the majority society. Here she found her views about the nature of religion and education challenged and she became convinced that the fundamental resource material for her work should be the children's own life-world and concerns. In this contextual approach, through interacting with each other and a variety of source materials, pupils are encouraged to see themselves in relation to the past and the future, looking 'inwards' to draw upon their own life-worlds and 'outwards' in relation to society. Pupils' individual concerns and questions, raised through their first and second hand experiences, are related to wider social and cultural issues, with 'local' issues acting as a bridge. Issues of social plurality and identity are connected to the lifeworlds of individual pupils at their own level. (Leganger-Krogstad, 2001; 2003).

Weisse's approach in Hamburg essentially combines religious education and education for citizenship in a multicultural society. The Hamburg approach is unusual in the German system in bringing children from different religious and

cultural backgrounds together in the same class for religious education. Where the subject differs from most approaches in England and Wales is in its emphasis on themes of social justice, peace and human rights as well as on understanding and learning from religions and on the exploration of existential questions. There is an overtly political dimension: RE aims to help pupils to come to terms with various religious, ideological and political beliefs. It is also action-oriented, encouraging an 'active acceptance of responsibility towards society'.

The approach is underpinned by both theological and social justifications.<sup>iv</sup> The approach unashamedly adopts a value position that is protective of justice and social harmony; there is a distancing from religious and political fundamentalist attitudes, regarded as being socially divisive and erosive of good citizenship. The method is dialogical and personal, with young people learning about others' positions, and clarifying their own, by comparing and contrasting their views with one another. The dialogical approach is overtly concerned with helping pupils to form a sense of their own personal identity, but also with key social issues. The issue of personal identity is seen in relationship to wider social and political issues. The starting point for dialogue is common experience of all as humans, not the similarities and differences of religions. *Personal* encounters are decisive; pupils' own personal views and commitments are the key source materials rather than the religious systems to which they might be associated. The approach acknowledges the inevitability of conflict, and that there will be situations of unsettled difference. There is a deliberate goal of affirming and appreciating difference within society. Much power is devolved to pupils to explore particular issues of concern (Weisse, 1996, pp. 275-6; 2003).

One thing that all of these approaches have in common is the emphasis that they put on the engagement of pupils with their own beliefs and values in relation to understanding others. They do not fit comfortably with national or local syllabuses that specify the systematic coverage of large amounts of information, leaving little or no space for interaction, reflection and criticism. Perhaps one of the main problems for religious education in countries such as Norway and England is the feeling of constraint felt by many teachers and students when it comes to exploring issues raised by children in class when the syllabus requires systematic coverage of too much information. More time needs to be allowed for pupils to initiate ideas, to reflect, to interact with ideas and to engage in critical discussion without allowing the subject to become too unstructured. The interpretive and dialogical approaches described above encourage the kind of 'differentiated citizenship' advocated by Iris Young (Young, 1990)

in which she argues for more institutions through which individual voices can be represented.

### **European Research**

The above discussion includes some examples of good practice in parts of Europe and reference to relevant Council of Europe projects. The discussion also suggests the need for further research in Europe. In recent years, some networks promoting collaborative research in religious education and associated fields have been developing (Larsson and Gustavsson, 2004). For example, the European Network for Religious Education through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA) gives attention to pedagogy in relation to issues of religion and society (Heimbrock, Schreiner & Sheilke, 2001; Miedema *et al*, 2004). One promising recent development is the funding by the European Union of a collaborative research project being conducted by teams from ten European Universities as part of the Framework 6 programme on 'Citizens and governance in a knowledge based society', contributing to the section of the programme on 'Values and religions in Europe' (Jackson, 2006). The three year project, which began its work in March 2006, is entitled 'Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries' (REDCo) and is co-ordinated by Professor Wolfram Weisse of the University of Hamburg. The three year project aims to identify approaches and policies that can contribute to making religion in education a factor promoting dialogue in the context of European development. The findings will relate especially to religious education, but will also contribute to other values-related fields, such as citizenship education and intercultural education. Each participating university will be responsible for an individual study. The studies and their co-ordinators are as follows:

University of Hamburg: Dialogical and inter-religious learning in religious education: a correlation of theoretical approaches and classroom interaction: a case study of schools in Hamburg (Professor Wolfram Weisse).

University of Warwick: Teaching about religious diversity in schools: the use of action research to apply and develop the interpretive approach to the study of religions (Professor Robert Jackson).

École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne, Paris: The role of religion in education in the context of a laical state: a study of the contribution of religious education in a changing societal context and an analysis of the daily practice of religious plurality in schools (Professor Jean-Paul Willaime)

Free University of Amsterdam: Teachers' life-stories: their influence on the religious development of pupils and on their development of dialogical competences for inter-religious dialogue in Christian and Islamic elementary and secondary

schools in the Netherlands (Professor Siebren Miedema and Professor Cok Bakker).

University of Stavanger: Identity formation and intercultural dialogue: a study of educational policy and classroom practice in Norwegian religious education (Associate Professor Geir Skeie).

University of Tartu, Estonia: Developing religious education in the post socialist context (Dr Pille Valk).

University of Münster: Dialogical Islamic religious education for a European context: concepts for teacher training at university and approaches to an Islamic religious education at school (Professor Muhammad Kalisch).

Deutsches Orient Institut (German Institute for Middle East Studies): Europe, identities, and inter-religious dialogue (Professor Udo Steinbach).

Russian Christian Academy for Humanities (St.Petersburg): Intercultural religious education in Russia: education for integration (Professor Vladimir Fedorov)

University of Granada: The legacy of *Al-Andalus*: religious diversity and inter-religious relations in Southern Spanish schools and neighbourhoods (Dr. Günther Dietz and Dr. Francisca Ruiz Garzón).

In addition to the individual studies, there will be a range of collaborative activities involving members of the research teams working in pairs or other groupings. For example, pairs of institutions will conduct comparisons of their own systems for religious education in relation to regional and societal factors. Different pairings will focus on specific topics, for example in raising generic issues relating to research methodology and pedagogy. General areas of co-operation include theory, methodology, classroom analysis, comparative study and education of teachers at university level. The outputs of the project will include annual reports and a final report in addition to articles, book chapters and books, visual resources and conferences. It is hoped that the project will lay the foundations for continuing collaborative research and theoretical reflection on religious education in the European context and potentially make a strong contribution to the promotion of religious tolerance and non-discrimination in schools.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> 'In accordance with the spirit of the Human Rights Act and to take account of the diversity of our communities, faith groups can propose to set up their own schools' (Estelle Morris, personal communication, 2001).

<sup>ii</sup> This article is open to different interpretations. For example, in the view of Amnesty International it guarantees people the right of access to existing educational institutions; but does not require the government to establish or fund a particular type of education. On this view, the requirement to respect parents' convictions is intended to prevent indoctrination by the state (*Amnesty*, September-October 2000).

<sup>iii</sup> The Warwick RE Project was a curriculum project that used the interpretive approach to present material derived from ethnographic studies of children from different religious/ethnic backgrounds in Britain to children in mixed religious education classes. Materials were produced for 5-7, 7-11 and 11-13 age groups (e.g. Barratt, 1994; Jackson, Barratt and Everington, 1994). The interpretive approach as a methodology is not limited to the use of ethnographic material, however.

<sup>iv</sup> The theological influence comes especially from the Christian theologian Hans-Jochen Margull and the Jewish theologian Martin Buber, and Biblical themes such as the idea that all people are children of God are invoked. The socio-political justification is grounded in the kind of 'humaneness' that is embodied in declarations of human rights, such as the United Nations Charter on the Rights of Children.

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**The Fifth National Symposium**  
on  
**Religious Education and Ministry**  
will be held at

**Australian Catholic University, McCauley Campus, Brisbane.**

**Keynote speaker:**

**Professor Robert Jackson**

**Director of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit  
University of Warwick (UK).**

**Dates: Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June – Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June.**

Information about registration and the submission of abstracts will be posted later this year on the ACU website:

<http://rel-ed.acu.edu.au/ren/sym2007.html>