

Professor Robert Jackson is Emeritus Professor at the University of Warwick in the UK, where he founded the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) in 1994. He was the director of WRERU until 2012, and still an active part of the unit.

Professor Jackson is a leading international figure within Religious Education. His work has been profoundly important for researchers, teacher trainers, policy makers and students – and surely many other groups – for at least 20 years. He has had a major impact on religious education in Norway as well. First and foremost through his work, but also through his huge network of friends, colleagues and former students here in Norway. We are many that have benefited a lot from Jackson's insight, warmth and enthusiasm.

Jackson worked as a religious education teacher in Nottingham before moving to Coventry as a teacher trainer in 1972. In 1978 was appointed to the University of Warwick, where he has remained ever since.

In 1997 he published his book "Religious Education: an interpretive approach", which sets out his distinct approach to Religious Education. Religious Education can be a research based, multi-faith framework for a form of education that fosters understanding across cultural and religious diversity, strengthens a human rights based understanding of citizenship and non-discrimination, according to Jackson. The 1997 book outlines the philosophical and educational grounding for the approach, and provides some key concepts.

Representation, interpretation and reflexivity.

How does a teacher represent "a religion" in the classroom? Jackson insists on the importance of involving learners in an ethnographically informed understanding of, say, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism. This means taking the internal diversity seriously within religious traditions. The main conceptual innovation is to suggest that teachers are aware of three levels, namely the individual, the group and the religious tradition. The main thrust of the argument implies that the default mode of much religious education is to present a simplified, maybe even essentialised, version of a religious tradition, and then leave it at that. This misses the lived reality of religious lives, and not only gives students lacking, or unhelpful, knowledge – but is a lost opportunity for education to build new learning on the day-to-day experiences of the learners.

The concept of interpretation looks at how we can learn about a religious or non-religious world-view different than your own. Jackson suggests that such learning benefits from comparing and contrasting the concepts of new tradition with concepts you already hold, thus moving back and forth between insider and outsider concepts. Knowledge starts with what we already know, but can expand and deepen through such interpretive processes.

Finally, the concept of reflexivity, which demands that the learning process includes a second look at itself – a meta-reflection. Has the new learning caused a re-assessment of your previously held world view? What happens when we take a step back and look critically at the material studied? Do previously held critiques of religion, or a religious tradition still stand? Are they strengthened? Do we have good access to sources to understand whatever we have studied? Was this the right way of doing it?

The interpretive approach has been developed and refined since then, but more importantly, it has been used. Here we highlight two arenas where the interpretive approach has been put to use. Firstly, it was the overarching framework for the REDCo-project. A large scale EU-funded international research project on Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict in which Professor Jackson played a leading role. Secondly, the interpretive approach has been key in developing European level policy.

Jackson has been involved with the Council of Europe and the OSCE since 2002. In 2007 he played an important role in the establishment of the Toledo Guiding principles of the OSCE. He also played a key part of the establishment of the European Wergeland Centre here in Oslo in 2009. More recently, Professor Jackson has written the book "Signposts". It is written for policy makers, schools and teacher educators across Europe, and aims at making the Council of Europe's recommendations on Religious Education better known. The interpretive approach is a key theme throughout the book.

Along side this, Jackson has received international prizes, been an academic and social hub in international networks such as ISREV and ENRECA, edited a key journal and book series, held innumerable keynotes and international lectures and been involved in countless research projects. However, we have to mention the trombone, and his passion for jazz. Jackson has been playing jazz with top musicians for decades, and frequently enjoys entertaining colleagues and friends with performances with local musicians wherever he travels. The sense of tradition and innovation, the sensitivity and attention to others, and the creative and human warmth and energy that flows from his music also characterises his academic work.