

ASCILITE 2023

People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Exploring the intersection of digital pedagogies, reflexivity, and culture in religious education

Anne Siri Kvía and Thomas Cochrane

Oslo Metropolitan University, University of Melbourne

This concise paper reports on the development of a Design-Based Research PhD project that explores the potential of virtual reality and digital pedagogies to enhance reflexivity in the context of religious education and cultural diversity awareness. The research is based in a Norwegian context and aims to develop transferable design principles for enhancing reflexivity in religious education for student teachers. The paper outlines the context, design framework, initial prototype intervention, initial participant feedback, as well as next steps in the research.

Keywords: Design-Based Research, Reflexivity, Religious Education, Virtual Reality.

Introduction

Design-Based Research (DBR) provides a structured and rigorous approach to addressing complex problems and has been increasingly used for educational designs at the intersection of educational technology and culture (McKenney & Reeves, 2020; Reeves, 2015; Reeves et al., 2005). DBR begins with an identified (pedagogical or innovation) problem and then follows three stages of design: analysis and exploration, design prototype, evaluation and feedback on implementation followed by iterative redesign and evaluation, leading to the development of transferable design principles for wider contexts. This paper reports on the first stage of the DBR process in a PhD project exploring ways to enhance student reflexivity within religious education in Norway.

Context: Religious Education in Norway

In Europe, different countries provide religious education (RE) according to different models, as a specific subject or integrated with subjects like social studies or history (Jensen, 2005, pp. 63-66). At the policy level in Europe, there has been a shift to include religion as an aspect of intercultural education since the early 2000s (Jackson, 2008). Robert Jackson (2008), a central figure in the field of RE, points out that although international initiatives to encourage the study of religious diversity had started before the terror attack on September 11th, 2001, this and other attacks, contributed to putting religion at the focus of attention for key international policymakers like the Council of Europe (Jackson, 2008, p. 152). On the policy level, post 9/11, religious education has gained ground as an important aspect of public education in Europe (Johannessen & Skeie, 2019). At the same time, there is a range of policies and understandings of the study of religions and the role of religion in education, thus also different ways European states accommodate religious education within their educational systems (Jackson, 2008, pp. 164-166). In Norway, Christianity, Religion, Worldview, and Ethics (KRLE) is a compulsory school subject provided in public schools from first grade (6 years) thru 10th grade (16 years) and is regulated by the Norwegian Education Act and a national curriculum. KRLE has a long and complex history as a distinct school subject in Norway, historically targeting different aims. In the most recent revision of the curriculum that was implemented in 2020, the above-mentioned European policy developments are clearly present, giving intercultural education an important justification for KRLE (Bråten & Skeie, 2020, p. 14; Korsvoll, 2020).

Theoretical framework

Robert Jackson's interpretive approach (1997) offers an approach to RE that emphasizes the current plurality of worldview traditions in society, their inner diversity, and the complexity of competencies promoted in intercultural education (Jackson, 1997). The model is theoretically rooted in Clifford Geertz's ethnographic hermeneutics and has three key concepts, representation, interpretation, and reflexivity (Jackson, 1997). The approach is highly influential and widely recognized in European RE including in the 2020 curriculum of Norwegian RE. The key concept representation addresses a longstanding debate in RE pedagogy of how to work with complex religious traditions to novice learners without upholding simplified or essentialist portrayals thereby running the risk that teaching in RE may confirm stereotypical conceptions of religions, groups, or individuals. By proposing to work with religions on three analytical levels (tradition, groups, individual) the inner diversity of a tradition is highlighted. In this way, the flexibility of how worldviews have changed over

time and the various ways it has been and is currently practised by cultural groups and individuals are displayed. Building on hermeneutical theories of understanding, Jackson's key concept interpretation anchors the learning process in the individual's preunderstandings, familiar conceptions, and experiences. Because of this, interpretation is closely related to the third key concept, reflexivity. Reflexivity in the interpretive approach points to three aspects of learning in RE. Firstly, it refers to the transformation (edification) of the subjective learner. This may arise when the encounters with 'the other' prompt reflection on one's own way of life. Secondly, reflexivity involves a critical attitude in the interpretative process, like reflecting on the concept of religion and questions of truth and meaning (Jackson, 1997, pp. 129, 132-134). Thirdly, reflexivity entails that the learners critically evaluate the learning materials and learning activities they are involved in (ibid.). Overall, the competencies trained in the interpretive approach coincide with intercultural competence and are both cognitive knowledge, skills of dialogue and sensitive interaction, and attitudes like respect for human dignity.

More recently, Martha Shaw has proposed a framework for what she calls 'worldview literacy' that further develops elements from the interpretive approach (Shaw, 2022). Compared to Jackson, Shaw's framework connects RE to a broader educational context, situating RE within a pragmatic understanding of education as practice of democracy and citizenship (Shaw, 2022, pp. 9-11). By suggesting worldview literacy to conceptualize RE as praxis, Shaw stresses that developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes are inseparable and developed in encounters with diversity. Learning in RE is thus rendered transformative as a hermeneutic act of understanding, interpretation, and application, a cumulative circular process rather than transmissive (Shaw, 2022, pp. 204-205). In both Shaw and Jackson, hermeneutical theory provides the basis for asserting reflexivity as embedded in the act of understanding 'the other's' way of life and oneself. They assume the simultaneous development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but do not explicate the exact relations between reflexivity and agency or action. From a pragmatic perspective, all actions are rooted in inner speech, rendering the primary function of reflexivity in its potential to guide future action as reflexivity allows assessment of and exploring alternatives to our dispositions (Archer, 2010, pp. 2, 5, 9). Effectively, reflexivity is seen to contribute to transformative learning and may guide RE students' professional development in teacher education.

The problem: Enhancing reflexivity

The main aims of KRLE echo the integration of religion in intercultural education, seeking to develop cultural competence that enables pupils to live and thrive in a plural, democratic society (Bråten & Skeie, 2020, p. 14). Thus, teaching KRLE requires the ability to provide pedagogical activities that entail more than merely transmissive learning, namely activities where the learners explore and engage with a range of diverse perspectives. In this way, they may encounter themselves—essentially *transformative encounters* (Shaw, 2022, pp. 204-205). In teacher education, the students need experience with the pedagogical approaches we encourage them to facilitate in school. Yet, there is currently a lack of empirical research on reflexivity in RE for student teachers (as well as pupils). This research explores the design and iterative development of a toolkit (*The Reflexive Rucksack*) to scaffold student teacher reflexivity within this context – effectively developing a learner centric ecology of resources (Luckin, 2008). This toolkit is a step-by-step workflow including retrospective self-reflection at several stages: virtual encounters with religious diversity, face-to-face encounters with different interpretations from fellow students, and reflections on future implications in professional development.

Methodology

Design-based research method offers an approach to problem analysis, develop solutions to the identified problem, and to explore and evaluate the impact of the design in iterative interventions in real learning situations (McKenney & Reeves, 2018, pp. 6-11). To study how to facilitate reflexivity and enhance student teachers' intercultural competence in natural learning settings, the following research questions have guided the research:

- How does a reflexivity toolkit address the student's awareness of the significance of their subjective experiences and worldviews when encountering religious diversity?
- What is the perceived value of reflexivity as a resource for professional development and diversity competence for student teachers in RE?
- What are guidelines for reflexive activities with student teachers in RE?

Design

Drawing on design principles to enhance reflexivity, a prototype reflexivity toolkit for RE student teachers was developed as a model for them to later utilise in their own teaching practice. Aiming to provoke an emotional and cognitive response and to scaffold individual awareness of how subjective dispositions influence

interpretations, two 360 clips were selected for the toolkit. The 360 materials addressed religious diversity in traditions suitable to the participants' course plan and targeted their anticipated Zone of Proximal Development. Using purposeful sampling the researcher established a collaboration with a cohort of student teachers in RE – the participants in the prototype design implementation. Ethics consent processes were followed – as detailed in the data collection section. The reflexivity toolkit was introduced to the participants in a workshop, a part of their introductory course in RE at a University in the eastern region of Norway at the point in their curriculum where they were exploring Christianity and Islam. The workshop was developed and led by the PhD student as the lead researcher, and the design process was supervised by an RE researcher in Norway and an educational technology researcher in Australia. In the workshop, the researcher also took on the role of teacher. The workshop started with a teacher-led introduction to theoretical perspectives and diversity competence in RE. The participants then received worksheets with individual writing assignments asking them to reflect on religious, cultural, ethnic, or other relevant backgrounds that influence their current worldview orientations, either religious or non-religious. For this task, they filled in an illustrated rucksack. After completing this retrospective task, the participants accessed two 360-degree videoclips inviting them to engage with selected examples of religious practice, one from Christian worship (figure 1) and the other from The Prophet's Mosque in Medina (figure 2).



VR / 360° Worship Experience at View Church Table View

Figure 1: Screenshot of Christian Worship video.



Roza-Rasool (PBUH)- Masjid Nabawi 360 6K

Figure 2: Screenshot of the Prophet's Mosque video.

The participants were requested to make written notes on their emotional and cognitive reactions to these clips and to reflect on how their backgrounds influenced their reactions. The participants were then combined in groups to share their answers, compare these, and give feedback to each other. They were further asked to reflect on links between the contents of their 'rucksacks' and their responses and to comment and discuss each other's interpretations of the 360-clips. Finally, they were to discuss potential implications the encounter with the religious practices and each other's different responses may have for them as future KRLE teachers.

Data Collection

Participation in the research was based on informed, written consent in line with Norwegian research ethics regulations. The research project is registered with and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, with reference number 242005. The primary data consists of 40 worksheets from the students' written assignments and audio recordings of 5 group discussions (approximately 30-45 minutes) involving 20 students in total. All participants are anonymized in this study, the worksheets are not labelled with names, and the participants have been given fictional names as the audio recordings have been transcribed.

An example of the type of emotional, cognitive, and social constructivist responses that the rucksack generated is illustrated below.

- Emotional response: 'I get so happy and emotionally moved at the same time. I haven't been there myself but have always wanted to go there [...]. Feeling of belonging and fellowship'.
- Cognitive response: 'I have been to many different Mosques in my life, but that Mosque, which is one of the biggest & first in Islam, made by the Prophet M. has a special meaning to me as a Muslim. [...] Thought provoker: I need to learn more about that Mosque, why pilgrims travel to Medina too, after visiting the Kaaba in Mecca'.
- Group conversation: 'Background knowledge, my values, the knowledge I have / will learn about different religions play an important role when understanding other's religion/worldview'.

A word cloud summary of all responses to the Prophet's Mosque video is illustrated in figure 3 below, and a

express the impact of reflexive activities. To access how the participants utilise reflexivity to develop intercultural competence, it is also appropriate to design activities asking the participants to suggest or perform actual RE-teaching in a school setting. Due to these issues, the researcher is currently looking for partnerships with teacher educators for more long-term cooperation and preferably multiple iterations in a RE-course.

Conclusions

In the prototype design intervention, the reflexivity toolkit introduces reflexive activities in empirical settings and is designed to stimulate student teachers' reflexivity. This paper reports some examples of the participants' responses and initial results suggest that academic humility is provoked, but more importantly, that the participants need more support. Upcoming iterations will provide firmer support for the design principles; however, the preliminary analyses indicate that the reflexivity toolkit has the potential to stimulate academic humility and introspection. A more careful scaffolding knowledge about the provided materials and better support in the reflexive activities (understanding the impact of the rucksack or ecology of resources) is expected to generate an assessment of dispositions and elaborations on alternative perspectives.

References

- Archer, M. S. (2010). *Conversations About Reflexivity*. London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203867556>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
<http://digital.casalini.it/9781526417305> <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsqmip.2022.1.33.46>
- Bråten, O. M., & Skeie, G. (2020). 'Deep Learning' in Studies of Religion and Worldviews in Norwegian Schools? The Implications of the National Curriculum Renewal in 2020. *Religions*, 11(11).
<http://digital.casalini.it/5282292> <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel111110579>
- Jackson, R. (1997). Religious education: an interpretive approach. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Jackson, R. (2008). Teaching about Religions in the Public Sphere: European Policy Initiatives and the Interpretive Approach. *Numen*, 55(2-3), 151-182. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852708X283032>
- Jensen, T. (2005). European and Danish Religious Education: Human Rights, the Secular State, and Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality. *Religion & Education*, 32(1), 60-78.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2005.10012351>
- Johannessen, Ø. L., & Skeie, G. (2019). The relationship between religious education and intercultural education. *Intercultural Education*, 30(3), 260-274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2018.1540142>
- Luckin, R. (2008). The learner centric ecology of resources: A framework for using technology to scaffold learning. *Computers & Education*, 50(2), 449-462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2007.09.018> (Development, Disruption & Debate - Selected Contributions from the CAL 07 Conference)
- McKenney, S., & Reeves, T. (2020). EDUCATIONAL DESIGN RESEARCH: Portraying, conducting, and enhancing productive scholarship. *Medical Education*, 55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14280>
- McKenney, S., & Reeves, T. C. (2018). *Conducting Educational Design Research* (Second edition. ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315105642>
- Reeves, T. (2015). Educational design research: Signs of progress. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 31(5), 613-620. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.2902>
- Reeves, T., Herrington, J., & Oliver, R. (2005). Design research: a socially responsible approach to instructional technology research in higher education. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 16(2), 97-116.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02961476>
- Shaw, M. (2022). Worldview literacy as intercultural citizenship education: A framework for critical, reflexive engagement in a plural democracy. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979211062125>

Kvia, A. S., & Cochrane, T. (2023). Exploring the intersection of digital pedagogies, reflexivity, and culture in religious education. In T. Cochrane, V. Narayan, C. Brown, K. MacCallum, E. Bone, C. Deneen, R. Vanderburg, & B. Hurren (Eds.), <i>People, partnerships and pedagogies</i> . Proceedings ASCILITE 2023. Christchurch (pp. 472 - 476). https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2023.458

Note: All published papers are refereed, having undergone a double-blind peer-review process. The author(s) assign a Creative Commons by attribution license enabling others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon their work, even commercially, as long as credit is given to the author(s) for the original creation.