PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF UNDERSTANDING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH REPORT

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

DR KAREN WALSHE AND DR GEOFF TEECE

AUGUST 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a collaborative research study, generously funded by The Farmington Institute, Oxford, conducted by two Russell Group Universities: one in the South West of England; the other, in the Midlands. Both universities are long standing providers of Secondary PGCE Religious Education courses as part of their Secondary PGCE provision (rated by Ofsted as Outstanding). In addition, both universities are research intensive institutions whose ITE programmes are inspired and informed by research in the field.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The study which was conducted in 2010-2011, set out to examine subject specialist secondary school pre-service teachers' conceptions of what counts as understanding in Religious Education (RE). It emerged from the authors' shared interest in what might be meant by 'understanding' in Religious Education in secondary schools in the UK. This interest arose out of on-going concerns regarding students' achievement and progress in RE, which, according to the Office for Standards in Education may be largely due to teachers' lack of understanding of the content and pedagogy of the subject and of how students learn and make progress in RE (Ofsted, 2010, 2013).

Similar concerns had been raised by the academic RE community. Research suggests, for instance, that for many young people, understanding in RE is often equated with belief (Freathy and Aylward 2010). This has serious implications for the way in which the RE curriculum promotes 'understanding' as a principal aim of RE. Moreover, given the lack of consensus amongst religious educators regarding the nature, aims and purposes of RE (Conroy et al 2013), this project sought to undertake a small scale study to examine pre-service teachers' understanding of what is meant by 'understanding' in RE. As entrants to the profession, their perspectives, may help to shed some light on the contested nature of this seemingly innocuous educational aim.

PARTICIPANTS

The project involved a total of 31 pre-service teachers of Religious Education: 11 of whom attended the Higher Education Institute (HEI) in the South West of England; and 20 attended the HEI in the Midlands. The majority of participants were female (71.0% n=22). Nine of the participants were male (29.0%). Participants held undergraduate/post-graduate degree qualifications from a variety of academic disciplines, namely: Theology (22.0% n=7); Philosophy (22.0% n=7); Religious Studies (20.0% n=6); Islamic Studies (20.0% n=6); and Sociology (16.0% n=5). The majority of pre-service teachers attending the South West HEI came from a Religious Studies (45.0%) or Philosophy (27.0%) background. The majority of those attending the Midlands HEI came from an Islamic Studies (30.0%) or Theology (30.0%) background.

4

ETHICS

Ethical approval for the study was gained from the University of Exeter ethics committee. All secondary PGCE RE pre-service teachers in both institutions were invited to take part in this project. They were informed about the aims and the nature of the study during a PGCE seminar in their respective institutions. Those participating had self-selected by completing and returning a consent form. The consent form informed participants that the data would be kept securely and that anonymity and confidentially would be maintained throughout, including in any publications arising out of the project.

METHOD

The study employed six semi-structured focus group discussions (FGD) as it was felt that the discussion generated by the sharing of ideas between participants, and the resulting agreements and disagreements, would result in far richer data than might be gathered by conducting individual interviews. Each FGD lasted approximately one hour. All FGDs were audio recorded (with permission from the participants) and transcribed.

The interview schedule included a research instrument adapted from Newton and Newton's earlier study on understanding in curriculum subjects (1999) and presented participants with two scenarios (see Appendix). Participants were asked to select from a list of statements, which statement(s) they considered most indicative of understanding in each scenario and encouraged to justify their choice.

Participants were then invited to explore a) what might be meant by the development of pupils' understanding n RE); b) the extent to which understanding in RE may be similar or different to understanding in other subject disciplines. Finally, participants were invited to offer any further thoughts regarding understanding in RE.

ANALYSIS

The data analysis was inductive and employed the process of open, axial and selective coding as outlined in Mills et al. 2010), using *NViVo 11 for Mac* as a data management tool. Initially, the data was analysed using open coding . This allowed us to generate tentative codes that captured and summarised what the participants were saying. For example, during this first stage of analysis, codes such as those identified below were assigned to chunks of data:

- Knowledge recall
- Own opinion
- Fits in with prior knowledge

In the second stage of analysis, axial coding grouped the codes together into more conceptually related categories. So codes such as 'knowledge recall'; 'own opinion'; 'fits in with prior knowledge', were categorised as 'discursive forms of knowledge/understanding' (Reid 1986). Similarly, codes such as personal understanding and 'inter-personal understanding' were categorised as non-discursive forms of knowledge/understanding (Reid 1986).

Finally, a third stage of analysis employed selective (or substantive) coding to further define some of the key concepts that had emerged as a result of the open and axial coding of the dataset. For example, the concept of inter-personal understanding was further defined and assigned codes relating to ideas concerning the nature, affordances and constraints of insider and outsider understanding(s).

This third stage of analysis identified a number of metaphors in the data. For instance, participants talked about how understanding was akin to 'seeing' in that understanding could be like 'looking at something from different sides' and 'seeing it for the first time'. Consequently, as part of this final stage we employed an idiographic approach to metaphor analysis, inductively identifying metaphors that appeared organically in the transcripts (Redden 2017).

Metaphorical language relating to the target domain UNDERSTANDING was identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007). Thus analysis of the data implemented the following steps, as outlined by the Pragglejaz Group (2007, 3) ; Steen (2007, 12); and Cameron and Maslen (2010, 104-110):
1. Transcripts of the focus group discussions were read in full to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2. For each lexical unit (e.g. a word; part of a word; chain of words) that related to participants' considerations of what might be meant by 'understanding', decisions were made concerning:
   a) Its contextual meaning (establish its meaning in the context of this discourse)
   b) Its basic meaning (determine whether it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts)
   c) Whether its contextual meaning is sufficiently distinct from its basic meaning
   d) Whether its contextual meaning can be related to its more basic meaning by some form of similarity. If so, the lexical unit was marked as metaphorical.

Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)
The following is an example of how a selection of a transcript was analysed and a key metaphor extracted.

Extract from Focus Group Discussion: FG3
"You still have to understand basic concepts, particularly with religions that aren't yours. You have to grasp how they're seen by adherents to that religion."

6

Lexical unit	Grasp
Contextual meaning	Understand how a concept is perceived within a faith community
Basic meaning	To seize and hold firmly with one's hands
Metaphoricity	The contextual meaning of 'grasp' is sufficiently distinct from its basic meaning as it is not possible to seize and hold on to an abstract concept with one's hands. Metaphoricity of 'grasp' is established.
Metaphor extracted	Understanding is GRASPING

As acknowledged by, for example Steen (2007) and Schmitt (2005), finding metaphor in discourse is not just a matter of identifying metaphorically used words, but also of identifying their related conceptual structures. To this end, having extracted the individual metaphorical idioms (e.g. 'Understanding is when you see something for the first time'; 'Personal faith can bias and cloud understanding'), these were clustered together to form more substantial metaphorical concepts (e.g. 'understanding is SEEING'). Having extracted these fundamental concepts, data was analysed using the text search query function in *NViVo 11 for Mac* to confirm that all metaphors relating to these concepts had been detected. For each conceptual metaphor, common synonyms, (such as 'look', 'perceive', and 'view' for the 'understanding is SEEING' metaphor), were included.

The decision was taken to exclude delexicalized verbs such as *make*, *have*, and *get* from analysis. Whilst Jakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrate how usage of such terms may indicate the presence of metaphor (that is, to say that we *get* an idea is to treat the abstract notion of idea as if it were an object that could be gained or lost), it is notoriously difficult to establish the basic meanings of these verbs (Pragglejaz Group 2007), and consequently, their metaphoricity. In addition, the term 'worldview' was omitted, as its presence in RE curricular documentation is pervasive, suggesting that participants' use of the term was likely to be habitual rather than illustrative of their own conceptions of 'understanding'.

The focus group discussion data amounted to 31,610 words, 26,972 (85%) of which were participant turns.

FINDINGS:

Using *NViVo 11 for Mac*, open and axial coding resulted in the dataset being classified into the following four categories, each with its own sub-categories, as outlined in Table 2 below:
1. Discursive forms of knowledge/understanding
2. Non-discursive forms of knowledge/understanding
3. Nature of understanding
4. Metaphors for understanding

7

NODES	SOURCES	REFERENCES
1. Discursive forms of knowledge/understanding	6	156
Analysis	6	9
Application	4	16
Explanation	6	57
Evaluation	5	14
Knowledge recall	6	35
Synthesis	5	25
2. Non-discursive forms of knowledge/understanding	6	193
Personal understanding	6	73
Inter-personal understanding:	5	120
3. Nature of understanding	6	110
Complex	1	5
Multifarious/ Multifaceted	6	29
Discipline/domain specific	4	11
Relationship between understanding, knowledge & belief	3	19
Degrees of understanding	6	46
4. Metaphors for understanding	6	153
Understanding is constructing	6	42
Understanding is seeing	6	92
Understanding is GRASPING	6	19
TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERENCES		618

8

1. DISCURSIVE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING

As Table 1 demonstrates, much of these participants' discussions centered around to the extent to which particular skills could be said to evidence understanding.

When participants discussed discursive forms of understanding, they generally agreed that:
- Being able to recall facts about a religious tradition does not equate to understanding:
- Being able to offer an explanation of what a religious concept/belief might mean, particularly in terms of its significance for religious believers, is one of the signs of understanding.
- Being able to show how a particular belief might impact on the way that people live their lives is a sign of understanding.
- The ability to take something apart; to look at its component parts; to understand that there might be different ways of interpreting it, is also a sign of understanding.
- Being able to see new knowledge in the context of what is already known; to see how the various parts come together as a whole, demonstrates understanding.
- An ability to weigh up the evidence, to form and to justify an opinion with reference to that evidence, is indicative of 'full(er)' understanding.

TABLE 3: DISCURSIVE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING: EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS

DISCURSIVE	EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS
Knowledge recall	With the Gina one you don't know that she knows much about Buddhism. She might just know basic facts of Buddhism.
	The top ones don't really do that, they just recall the story.
	I think they think that because they know the story, because they know the content of the story, that they understand the story. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they've gripped with the religious concepts of the story.
	Someone just regurgitating what they've heard and saying it back which isn't necessarily …doesn't necessarily mean they've understood it, they've just been able to throw it all back to you without understanding anything.
	I don't think Sarah learnt anything from the miracle of Jesus, cos what is she learning if she can just repeat the story?
	Just knowing the facts about it, you're not understanding it, I don't think.
Explanation	I think that when you understand something you can supply a plausible explanation
	The miracles aren't just good things that happen. It's a sign that the Messiah has come.
	Rebecca's saying that she knows for Christians it means Jesus is the Son of God – she's developing more of an understanding from Tom who's

	just saying 'I know what a miracle is' as opposed to saying 'I understand why it's important'.
	I wanted them to say something more about what it means for Christians generally, so something perhaps about the power or the importance of God perhaps.
	Rebecca because she says 'for Christians this means Jesus was the Son of God'
	From what I know about the miracles of Jesus they represent for Christians that Jesus was the Son of God, so I'd say Rebecca understood it best.
Application	For Rebecca it's the application of how that manifests in the lives of Buddhists.
	She has to understand the concepts first to then apply it
	You'd need a greater understanding of Buddhism to see why a Buddhist would live their life the way they do
Analysis	Understanding the logic or consistency of something
	Tom is taking it a little bit further, you've got some kind of analysis…
	I'd probably go for Rebecca – trying to think outside the box – what did Jesus actually mean for Christians? Why is he such an influential figure? Who is he? What does he do? Why did he do it? Why is he a son of God?
	I would say it is to get pupils to understand that there is never one answer to things.
Synthesis	Placing within a wider contextual story
	I would be tempted to say that Rebecca had a good understanding because she understood the parable in relation to other Christian beliefs.
	Understanding about how a concept or a thing fits within the religion as a whole
	I think Rebecca has the greatest understanding of it cos she seems to be linking it in with the whole idea of Christianity and of why Jesus could perform these miracles – why Christians believe that Jesus could perform these miracles.
	The one that jumped out to me was the penultimate one 'I understand cos it fits in with what I already know' because to me, if she does already know something about Buddhism and it fits in with all of that and she can see how it fits it together and all clings together, that is an understanding of its greater role.
Evaluation	Being able to qualify opinions
	Maybe it's knowing what it is, knowing why it's there, and critiquing it. Maybe it's those three steps is understanding… fully understanding.
	Imrana makes a judgement as well…an evaluation…she says Jesus did heal…that's an opinion, a judgement.
	They need to consider them and say, not just whether they agree, but whether they think it's plausible and whether it could be true.

You need to understand something in order to give opinion on it.	
Looking at what different religions say and be able to form an argument.	

Participants also discussed whether:

- a) There is a difference between knowing and understanding
- b) Full understanding may be a combination of skills
- d) There is a difference between understanding of religion and understanding religion

2. NON-DISCURSIVE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING

Where participants referred to non-discursive forms of understanding, they did so primarily in terms of inter-personal understanding (that is, understanding of other people), and personal understanding (understanding of one's self and one's place in the world).

TABLE 4: NON-DISCURSIVE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING: EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS

NON-DISCURSIVE	EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS
Inter-personal understanding	It's sort of getting inside the religion and seeing the world from inside that religion.
	It's more like an empathetic understanding of religious persons. I think it's more getting a child to be a bit more empathetic with the religious person.
	I think they need to understand it from the perspective of a Christian and what it would mean for a Christian person to believe in a miracle of Jesus. When you learn about Hinduism you should try and see the world through Hindu coloured spectacles?
	You're getting the child to step into the shoes of a Hindu, a Sikh….
	To understand the religious ideas you have to understand it from the insider's point of view.
Personal understanding	The idea of reflexivity - understanding of self in some way and understanding of object of study.
	I think there's a difference between personal understanding – how you understand it personally, how it fits into your worldview…and academic understanding.
	You have to relate it to something in your life for it to make sense to you

11

	So she's taking her own opinion, she's already got some understanding of it, so she's taking her opinion and putting it in with what's been taught in the lesson.
	Religion is a core, it's in the middle of it really. It's how we spring off it and how we can relate it to ourselves.
	When Imrana says: 'I think that the four noble truths describe what life is like', she's showing she's learnt something *from* the four noble truths.

Selective (or substantive) coding was employed to facilitate further analysis of the concept 'inter-personal understanding', as illustrated by Table 5 below.

TABLE 5: SELECTIVE CODING: INTER-PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING

NODES		SOURCES	REFERENCES
Inter-personal understanding		6	120
Insider Understanding	Belief helps understanding	5	11
	Believe without understanding	3	7
	Only understand from own perspective	1	10
	Commitment to own perspective impacts on ability to understand another	3	4
	Partial	2	3
	Potential for Bias	2	6
	Required for true or deep understanding	3	18
Outsider's Understanding	Capacity to empathise	5	13
	Partial	4	20
	Phenomenological	1	1
	Potential for [full] understanding	3	19
	Preferable	1	6
	Reduces religion	1	2

As illustrated by Table 5 above, when deliberating the notion of inter-personal understanding, participants discussed the extent to which understanding of religion is possible from the perspective of the outsider or whether 'true' understanding is the prerogative of the insider alone. Ideas explored included:

- Whether it's possible for an outsider to understand the beliefs of another
- The idea that outsider understands can only ever be a partial understanding
- The notion that 'true' or 'deep' understanding is only possible from an insider's perspective
- The idea that belief may actually help understanding

- Whether the development of students' skills of empathy was both a primary purpose of and distinctive characteristic of RE.
- How understanding in RE should include an element of reflexivity and understanding of oneself.

Participants also discussed the extent to which:
- It's possible to believe in something without understanding it.
- A commitment to one's own perspective affects one's ability to understand another.
- One can only ever understand anything from one's own perspective.
- An insider's perspective may be biased and clouded
- An outsider's perspective may therefore be preferable
- An outsider's perspective may reduce religion, particularly if it views religion through a phenomenological lens.

TABLE 6: INSIDER/OUTSIDER UNDERSTANDING: EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS

INSIDER/OUTSIDER	EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS
The possibility of outside understanding	I think that I can still have a pretty good crack at understanding the Hajj for example, maybe in relation to goals in life or something. If you get the significance behind it you can still go, maybe not 100% of the way, but you can still go 99% of the way to understanding what it's like short of actually going on Hajj.
	It can all make sense to everyone if it's taught correctly, in a religiously pluralist way, then there's absolutely no reason why it can't make sense to everyone.
	I'm going to say 'yeah' – because you don't need to be part of a religious faith to understand, have true religious understanding. I think it's about understanding how religions work and how certain people in religions do what they do. I don't think you need to be a member of a faith to really understand it.
	We were discussing this previously like how you can ever really understand from a religious believer's perspective and we were saying that you can really only ever understand from your own perspective.
Outsider understanding as partial	The idea of trying to understand a religion that you don't belong to , you're never going to be able to properly do it…. you're only going to get an appreciation.
	You can't develop a full understanding of a religion if you don't have the belief. If you are from that religious perspective you've got so much more of an insight.
	I would say it's possible but very, very, very, very extremely hard if you're not an insider.

13

	I'm not sure whether it's ever, ever going to be possible for someone who doesn't belong to a faith, to have a true understanding of it.
True/deep understanding is only possible for an insider	If you use Karma as an example, I understand the ins and outs of the laws of Karma. Now if I had a true understanding of Karma wouldn't I live my life differently?
	For someone like me who is committed to one religion, I think I will, one day, have a true religious understanding of Christianity, but I won't ever have a true religious understanding of Islam.
	You might have to have faith in order to understand. Maybe one can only deeply understand something if they have that faith with it. I don't' think I could deeply understand Hinduism or something like that. I could understand principles and things like that and the way it might cause people to act but to have a deep understanding maybe you need to be a Hindu to deeply understand the principles of Hinduism.
Belief may help understanding	I think that's Imrana saying I understand it *because* I believe it.
	They might get it better than anybody because that's all they've grown up with and they know they believe it. If you are from that religious perspective you've got so much more of an insight.
	I think you're much more willing to understand something if you believe it. I don't know if knowledge and understanding are linked at all. I think that um, being part of a faith doesn't give you knowledge, but it gives you an understanding.

3. NATURE OF UNDERSTANDING

Across the six focus group discussions, some interesting issues were explored concerning the nature of 'understanding' itself:

- The fact that 'understanding' is such a complex and 'airy-fairy concept', and that different people conceptualise understanding in different ways, makes it very difficult to pin down, measure and assess
- There was disagreement as to whether there exists different types of understanding or whether those apparent types of understanding are simply component parts of the one 'understanding'
- There was also disagreement as to whether understanding is essentially the same thing in all situations, or whether it is context dependent. That is, whether for instance, understanding in 'History' looks different to understanding in 'Art' or 'Science' or 'RE' or whether the same principles and characteristics of 'understanding' can be applied to all curriculum subjects.
- Participants also discussed the gradability of understanding, the idea that there are degrees of understanding e.g. deep/shallow; broad/narrow; and full/empty.

NATURE OF UNDERSTANDNG	EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPTS
Complex nature of understanding	This whole understanding thing is such an airy-fairy concept.
	I don't think you can really ever measure it. I'm finding it quite difficult.
Multifarious or Multifaceted	Are there separate understandings or do they each describe part of one understanding?
	Are they all components of what it means to understand as a whole?
	Are you saying then that there's something slippery called understanding and these could be bits of it, or are these actually different forms of understanding?
	It's like parable of the blind men and the elephant – each person sees only one part of the elephant and assumes the whole elephant is like that one part.
	You can take a general view of understanding and apply that to different subjects. Surely the concept of understanding, there should be some sort of set of basic principles, and you apply that to different subjects.
Understanding as context dependent	We use the word understanding differently in different contexts.
	I think each subject has got its own uniqueness, which you can't really compare and contrast. So understanding in each of these subjects would be totally different, would be unique.
	I've been reading Michael Grimmitt and he suggested that what's distinctive about RE is religious understanding. What's distinctive about religious understanding compared to historical understanding, scientific understanding, mathematical understanding? Um, I don't know….
	I think that religious understanding is fundamentally different from historical understanding.
Relationship between knowledge, belief and understanding	Is that understanding or knowing? What is the difference between knowing and understanding?
	Is that understanding or is that belief?
	I'd say that's 'knowing,' not necessarily 'understanding'
	She's mixing up understanding with belief.
Degrees of understanding	Deep-Shallow
	Broad-Narrow
	Full-Empty
	High-Low
	Thick-Thin

15

4. USE OF METAPHORS

As illustrated by Tables 8 and 10 below, in addition to the above, participants employed the language of metaphor to express their understanding of understanding.

4.1 METAPHORICAL CONCEPTS

Implementation of the MIP resulted in the identification of 153 metaphorical instances and the extraction of 3 fundamental metaphorical concepts (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Schmitt 2005) from the data, as illustrated in table XX. The most widely used source domain mapped onto the target domain UNDERSTANDING was 'understanding is a SEEING', which accounted for 60.1% of references. Understanding is CONSTRUCTING' also emerged as substantial metaphors in this data, accounting for 27.5%. Finally, 'Understanding is GRASPING' accounted for 12.4% of references.

TABLE 8: METAPHORICAL CONCEPTS

	SOURCES (n=6)	REFERENCES (n=153)
Understanding is seeing	6	92
Understanding is constructing	6	42
Understanding is grasping	6	19

'Understanding is seeing'

Using the metaphor of 'sight' enabled participants to talk about how understanding can feel like 'seeing' something for the first time. However, understanding is not an all or nothing affair but a matter of degree, that is, it can be partial, clouded or clear. Moreover, understanding may be contingent and dependent to a large degree on the lens through which one is looking and the angle or perspective from which one is viewing.

TABLE 9. UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING: ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM FGDS

'Understanding is seeing'	'Understanding is when you see something for the first time'
	'A clear understanding is a really good understanding'
	'Personal faith can bias and cloud understanding'
	'You can see the story [of the miracle] through Christian coloured spectacles'
	'If you are from that religious perspective you've got so much more of an insight'
	'Need to take off one's own hat in order to look at things and explore ideas and perspectives that may be different to one's own'
	'I have no bias towards a Buddhist faith and therefore I can see it for what it is and appreciate it much easier'
	'You can really only ever understand from your own perspective'

	'Yeah I can <u>see</u> how music and incense and ritual and things….' 'I can <u>see</u> why they do that, that makes sense. They treat it like a person, it's like a King, it's like respected' 'To understand the religious ideas you have to understand it from the insider's <u>point of view</u> cos that's where it only makes it worthwhile and valuable' 'You miss the divine if you just <u>see</u> it from a sociological <u>point of view'</u> 'All of them <u>look beyond</u> what ordinary see, you're looking for meaning in words or images or explanations, causes. And that sort of skill that develops, that enquiring mind, curious mind' 'Understanding that there's a <u>myriad of perspectives</u> is very different to understanding other people' 'You can really understand what you're <u>looking at</u> and all the different sides to it'

'Understanding is constructing'

Furthermore, understanding results from fitting pieces together, like a jigsaw puzzle, and constructing the whole picture. Understanding is evident when one can see the whole and knows how the constituent parts relate to that whole. This act of constructing includes making connections between the parts and the whole, e.g. applying knowledge from one context to context; and, in the case of reflexivity, between the subject matter and one's own life.

TABLE 10. UNDERSTANDING IS CONSTRUCTING: ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM FGDS

'Understanding is constructing'	'<u>Building</u> understanding of the whole religion by understanding different aspects' 'Being able to <u>fit</u> all the pieces together like a jigsaw' 'Making <u>links</u> between aspects of a religion to the 'whole' religion' 'Could it just be that understanding is just something, like we can look at statements and understand how they <u>fit together</u>? Is that just that?' 'It's not just learning the story on its own but understanding how it <u>fits in with</u> what they've been doing so far' 'But it's a <u>whole big picture</u> isn't it? it's not just Jesus did miracles, he did other things as well. That's why Christians see him as so like… do you know what I mean?' 'It's <u>part of</u> a <u>bigger picture</u> that Jesus was the Son of God' 'Understanding about how a concept or a thing <u>fits</u> within the religion as a <u>whole'</u> 'Um and I think that understanding is a form of knowledge basically, which is a kind of shared social <u>construction</u> of reality'

17

'Understanding is GRASPING'

Participants used the metaphor of capture to describe how the experience of trying to understand a concept or idea for instance, can feel like attempting to grab hold of something ethereal that slips through our fingers.

TABLE 11. UNDERSTANDING IS GRASPING: ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM FGDS

'Understanding is GRASPING'	'You can understand something incorrectly if you haven't <u>grasped</u> the basic concept'
	'To <u>capture</u> something is to understand it fully'
	'Get to <u>grips</u> with....'
	'Understanding is<u> slippery</u> - it's like the blind men and the elephant'
	'Maybe that's what understanding is, an attempt to <u>grapple </u>with difficult concepts'
	'You have to <u>grasp</u> how it's seen by adherents to that religion'
	'Religious understanding is a personal <u>holding </u>of that religious belief'

PLEASE NOTE: The findings presented in this unpublished research report represent preliminary findings arising from the initial analysis of data gathered. It is hoped that more detailed analysis and exploration of the data will be reported in published journal articles in due course.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

REFERENCES

Cameron, L., and Maslen, R. 2010. "Identifying Metaphors in Discourse Data. In *Metaphor Analysis: Research Practice in Applied Linguistics, Social Sciences and the Humanities*, edited by Lynne Cameron and Robert Maslen, 97-115. London; Oakville: Equinox.

Conroy, J., Lundie, D., Davis, R., Baumfield, V., Barnes, L.P., Gallagher, T., Lowden, K., Bourque, N., and Wenell, K. 2013. *Does Religious Education Work? A Multi-Dimensional Investigation*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Freathy, R., and Aylward, K. (2010) "Everything is in parables": An exploration of students' difficulties in understanding Christian beliefs concerning Jesus, *Religious Education*, 105(1), 86-102

Mills, A.J., Durepos, G., and Wiebe, E. (Eds) (2010), Encyclopedia of Case Study Research. Sage publications.

Ofsted. 2013. *Religious Education: Realising the Potential*. Office for Standards in Education.

Ofsted. 2010. *Transforming Religious Education.* Office for Standards in Education

Prazzlejaz Group. 2007. "MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse." *Metaphor and Symbol* 22(1): 1-39.

Redden, S. M. (2017). Metaphor Analysis. In Matthes, C. S. Davis and R. F. Potter (eds.) *The International Encyclopaedia of Communication Research Methods*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Reid, L.A. (1986) *Ways of understanding and education*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Steen, G. (2007). "Finding Metaphor in Discourse: Pragglejaz and Beyond". *Culture, Language and Representation* Vol V, 9-25.

Walshe, K., and Teece, G. (2013) Understanding 'religious understanding' in Religious Education, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 35(3), 313-325.

19

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT
Aim of the project is to explore your understanding of what it means to understand in RE.

SCENARIO 1:   THE HEALING OF THE PARALYSED MAN

"One day David was ill and missed his RE lesson. Later his friends told him that they had been learning about the miracles of Jesus. In this lesson, the class learnt about one of the miracles of Jesus - the healing of the paralysed man. David thought he should try and catch up on what he had missed. He decided to choose one of his friends to explain it to him. He knew it would have to be someone who really understood the story. Each of his friends tried to persuade him that they had understood by saying:

Peter said	'I enjoyed it. It was fun'
Harry said	'I can remember what happened in the story'
Sarah said	'I could tell you the whole story'
Imrana said	'I think that Jesus did heal the paralysed man'
Tom said	'I can tell you what a miracle is'
Joy said	'I thought the lesson was easy'
Rebecca said	'I know that for Christians this means Jesus was the Son of God'
Hardeep said	'It made sense to me'
Geena said	'It fitted in with what I already know about Jesus' "

QUESTIONS:
1. Who do you think David should choose and why?
2. If you think that none of the above has fully understood the story, add another friend and tell us what they would say to show they had understood.
3. If you were teaching this lesson what would you want pupils to learn?

SCENARIO 2:   THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

"One day David was ill and missed his RE lesson. Later his friends told him that they had been learning about Buddhism. In this lesson the class learnt about the Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths. David thought he should try and catch up on what he had missed. He decided to choose one of his friends to explain it to him. He knew it would have to be someone who really understood these teachings. Each of his friends tried to persuade him that they understood the Four Noble Truths by saying:

Peter said	'I really enjoyed it. It was fun'
Harry said	'I can remember the words for the Four Noble Truths'
Sarah said	'I could tell you what the Four Noble Truths are'

Imrana said   'I think that the Four Noble Truths describe what life is like'
Tom said   'I know what the Four Noble Truths mean'
Joy said   'I thought the lesson was easy'
Rebecca said   'I know that for Buddhists the Four Noble Truths explain the meaning of life'
Hardeep said   'It makes sense to me'
Geena said   'It fits in with what I already know about Buddhism' "

QUESTIONS:
1. Who do you think David should choose and why?
2. If you think that none of the above has fully understood the Four Noble Truths, add another friend and tell us what they would say to show they had understood.
3. If you were teaching this lesson what would you want pupils to learn?

CONSTRUCTS OF UNDERSTANDING IN RE

QUESTIONS:

1. Ofsted and QCA refer to the development of pupils' religious understanding. What do you think this means?
2. What is the difference, if any, between religious understanding and understanding religion?
3. To what extent do you think understanding in RE is similar/different to understanding in these, or any other curriculum subject [use cards identifying the following subjects: History; Science; English: Art]

CONCLUDING QUESTION:
Is there anything else you would like to say about understanding in RE that you haven't had an opportunity to say?