Ethics and Undergraduate Research in the Study of Religion: Place-Based Pedagogy and Reciprocal Research Relations

Dr Mel Prideaux, University of Leeds

Abstract

In the undergraduate religious studies classroom at the University of Leeds students are introduced to the complexity of religion in locality. One of the most engaging ways to do this is through a place-based pedagogy utilising independent fieldwork as part of the learning process. However undergraduates, like seasoned researchers, must learn to balance and understand the way insider representations influence academic interpretations, and the way their academic interpretations and representations can lead to change in the community being studied. Place-based pedagogy has, therefore, an important ethical dimension that is not accounted for in the existing literature. Engaging with 'reciprocal research relations' as a way to navigate this terrain introduces students to the human impacts of their research and develops their self-awareness as researchers and 'religion specialists'. This paper will draw on the Leeds experience to build an understanding of the interaction between place-based pedagogy and reciprocal research relations which informs both teaching and research in the study of religion, and extends the existing discourse on the ethical dimensions of undergraduate research.

Introduction

The teacher-led 'visit' for children has been firmly established in the British religious education curriculum for many years. Taking children, usually in large groups, to a place of worship in order to extend their knowledge and understanding, and perhaps their skills of communication and empathy, has a taken-for-granted educational value. Such visits are also common-place in the undergraduate curriculum but there is relatively little attention given to how the undergraduate experience of such a visit may be, should be, and is qualitatively different; there is even less attention given to the ethical significance of the work the student undertakes. This article is an attempt to move the discussion and accounts of research-based learning away from the descriptive and the practice-led towards the analytical and ethical. Instead of the taken for granted benefit of the 'visit', the approach taken here focusses on the benefits of independent student research where the teacher does not mediate the experience. The student is supported to be attentive to the power relationships involved in the study of religion in locality. Using reciprocal research relations as a way of thinking through the ethical significance of student engagement with local communities, I pursue a claim that we can be providing a richer experience for students, and more meaningful interaction for local communities, by facilitating a reciprocal dimension in independent student research.

A number of articles in 'Teaching Theology and Religion' have discussed place-based pedagogy or closely related approaches such as 'experiential learning' (e.g. Carlson, 1998 and Glennon 2004). The particularity of the 'place-based' and kindred approaches is the prioritisation of the local and the situated. At my own institution, the University of Leeds, this place-based approach or 'locality studies' (Knott, 2009) has been a significant dimension of the Theology and Religious Studies curriculum for well over twenty years. As part of the Community Religions Project first year students have undertaken independent fieldwork visits to places of worship in Leeds, whilst finalists have undertaken the 'Religious Mapping of Leeds'. An important dimension of these curriculum tasks, and one which I will focus on in this article, has been reciprocity. The community members have (increasingly) been seen as partners in these endeavours – as people who will potentially benefit from, or at least have an active interest in, the outcomes of research. The website of the Community

Religions Project (https://arts.leeds.ac.ukuk/crp) is increasingly populated with these undergraduate reports. As well as developing the professional research relationships of faculty, as well as our learning and teaching opportunities, these reports are of value to the communities. As will be discussed below, this 'value' can range from simple recognition through to student reports being used to inform and shape the work of groups and communities. This reciprocal approach has been so unconscious at Leeds that we have rarely stopped to reflect on the evolution of the approach, and its significance. In this article, having mapped the context and modules at Leeds, I will identify what the contours of place-based pedagogy and reciprocal research relations are, and how they can be mapped in our undergraduate curriculum. Throughout, I will address why this approach is pedagogically and ethically significant and why it may be a model for colleagues at other institutions to explore. I will argue that the significance is not only in the better understanding and analysis of religion which the approach supports, but also in the skills and experience the student develops. Students who experience their research and learning as rooted in places, reciprocal, and ethically significant are more likely to be able to articulate their degree to employers[1], more likely to link the theoretical and the empirical and, ultimately, more likely to have a positive experience of their studies. Some of these students will also become the postgraduate students, and ultimately colleagues, of those who teach them.

Leeds, the Community Religions Project and the undergraduate experience

Leeds is a mid size city in Yorkshire (in the north of England) which is socially, ethnically and religiously diverse. As well as a significant Muslim community, with several mosques across the city, there are also large and thriving Sikh and Hindu communities, a Jewish community, and a diverse Christian presence which has been further diversified by the growth in African and other immigrant-initiated churches over the last decade. There are also thriving interfaith groups (Concord Fellowship), and a plethora of small religious groups including (for instance) Nation of Islam, Pagan and Baha'i. Within Leeds there are particular neighbourhoods (most notably Chapeltown) which are microcosms of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) and, in the case of Chapeltown specifically, are host to various religious groups which do not have a locally resident population. Leeds is also a University town, with three different higher education providers, of which the University of Leeds is by far the largest and itself plays host to a variety of religious groups and organisations for students, including Chaplaincy services and 12 different 'faith' societies. Leeds then is an excellent location for the study of religion and religious diversity.

The Community Religions Project has evolved over forty years but with a constant focus on the scholarly value of locality-based studies (Prideaux with Merrygold, 2014). In 2013 it was decided to re-focus the Community Religions Project around student education in order to more effectively foreground the independent and original research about Leeds which is conducted by undergraduates, and the pedagogical work which underpins the facilitation of this research. The Leeds approach to study of religions, as exemplified in the work produced for the Community Religions Project, has several key features which make it distinct in the UK higher education context, and these features relate to a suite of modules which form the backbone of learning and teaching.

The first year module 'Religion in Modern Britain' has been running for nearly twenty years and in that time virtually every student taking a degree including study of religion at the University of Leeds has participated. As well as a more traditional essay on a key issue in the method and theory of the study of religion, students also undertake an independent fieldwork visit to a place of worship in the

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[1] The 'Employability agenda' is a important feature of the current HE environment in the UK. Graduate employment is a key metric used in measuring institutional success.

local community, on which they write an assessed report. It is absolutely key that this visit is independent. The students must make the initial contact with the place of worship, must find out where it is, and must get themselves to it. For many, new to the city of Leeds, this is the first time they step out of the 'student bubble' and really start to engage with Leeds as the vibrant, multi cultural and multi religious city that it is.

Through their induction and training the students are required to actively engage with the requirements of the University ethical approval process for taught modules. This involves an understanding of what 'risk' might look like to a member of a community. Alongside this awareness of risk for those who are the subject of their research the students also reflect on what 'risk' might look like for them. Thankfully, we have never had a health and safety issue in our modules (though recently we have discussed what emotional and psychological risk might look like, a significant and interesting issue outside the confines of the present discussion). Helping students to think about their personal safety, about how to safely move around the city, and how to investigate what risks might be present in an unfamiliar area is not only superb training in fundamental life skills, it also helps them to be more sensitive to the community they are meeting, and more aware of the challenges that might be faced by, for example, a small religious community maintaining a building in an area of high vandalism. Along with their training in methods and methodology in the study of religion, the ethical and health and safety training is articulated as part of 'professionalization' training[2]. Students are being taught what it means to be a researcher, to ask the right questions, and to manage risk. They are doing this in a context where place is central – which methods, which risks are particular to this specific place?

In this initial project, students are also beginning to engage with, and understand, some of the issues with reciprocity. For many of them, it is initially very frustrating that their emails do not receive an answer, that there is nobody to answer the telephone, that the contact links on the website do not work. And yet, this is something which, with reflection, becomes a central learning moment. Understanding the pressures on communities, the lack of full time paid staff, and how peripheral the student request might be to the day to day running of the community, can be profoundly humbling for the eager student assuming that the local Gurdwara committee will be falling over themselves to greet the student and show them around. (Fortunately, there are such a large number of places of worship within walking distance or a short bus journey that few places of worship are inundated with requests, and teaching staff seek to head off this risk by careful monitoring.) Students start at this point to engage with both their developing role as a researcher and the relationship with the local community which shapes their learning in the particular local context of Leeds. Importantly, the best reports from this module are made available on the Community Religions Project website, and this is an important way in which the community sees some benefit from welcoming students into their place of worship. Religious groups, particularly those which are small or 'peripheral' are keen to have their activity noticed by students and keen to increase awareness of the work they do. As will be discussed below, there are also more subtle ways in which it is apparent the community feels they 'benefit' from these student visits. Though not straightforwardly reciprocal the public sharing of student research reinforces the sense of engagement with the community, and alerts students to the ethical responsibility inherent in the way they justify their observations.

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[2] In the sense that students leave their degree with research skills including ethics and health and safety awareness which may be expected in professional contexts. This is different to the 'neophyte researcher' model adopted by Gregg and Scholefield (2015), as it recognises that the graduate is an 'expert' to the employer, even if not necessarily to the academy.

The Religion in Modern Britain module also develops in students a strong sense of the history of the Community Religions Project. Through the materials on the website, and related publications (e.g. Knott, 1984 and 2004; Prideaux with Merrygold, 2014), students engage with the broader history of the locality based approach to the study of religions as well as the long history of undergraduate student engagement. Using and analysing publicly available student research reports, which are in some cases nearly as old as the current students, reinforces a sense of a 'family tree' of research in the study of religion. This invites students into a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) which they share with the faculty members who teach their courses. This sense of 'belonging' has obvious benefits in terms of cohort identity and student satisfaction but also, importantly for this narrative, engages students with a sense of responsibility towards the research community. Level one students see the importance of maintaining and supporting effective relationships between the University and local community partners, because they rely on them for access in order to carry out their first fieldwork visit.

Facilitated, supervised and carefully monitored by teachers with fieldwork experience this independence from first year is crucial. In many UK higher education contexts students would be taken on a teacher-organised visit (Robinson and Cush, 2010) the challenges of which will be discussed in more detail later. At this point it is important to note that the independence which is developed through the Leeds model is key to the students' ethical and analytical engagement with the field as well as their professionalization training and developing employability skills and their ability to produce high quality independent final year research.

The Religion in Modern Britain module lays the foundations for student fieldwork which they will draw on in other modules during their studies and which, in the final year of their studies, students can develop more extensively by applying to take part in the Religious Mapping of Leeds module. Again, this module has been running for decades – testament to the extraordinary but seemingly obvious benefits of close study of a local community – and is a valuable example of undergraduate research supported by place-based pedagogy. In this module students work as a group to 'map' either a local neighbourhood or a particular issue (such as 'religion and Fairtrade') in Leeds. Local reports cover much of the city and in alternate years previously mapped areas are returned to so that the archive extends both spatially but also over time. The level of reciprocity in this module is significant, as is the level of student independence. Groups have a 'community link', a local person who has detailed knowledge of the area and supports students to access networks. At the end of the mapping project the students present their findings to a gathering of the local community – inviting those who participated in the research project to find out how their contribution has shaped the findings and conclusions of the project. These community presentations are not always straightforward. Students have had to defend and justify their findings in a way which really helps them to understand how what they say about a neighbourhood matters to the people in it. Importantly, the presentation always takes place before completion of the report so that the report can be adjusted in response to the experience. The reports are made available online and are a resource which is already a significant archive of religion in Leeds.

The focus of the mapping report often, though not always, responds to a perceived community need, usually identified or suggested by the community link. Recent examples include requests to research how residents understand 'community' in the city centre, to map the changes in religious organisations present in a neighbourhood, and to research the extent of residents' awareness of religion in their neighbourhood. The community link may then use this research to inform their future work, and reports are referenced in a range of settings where an 'external view' might be beneficial. This sense of providing research which is 'useful' is key in encouraging students to think

about the purpose of academic research and the power relationship between researcher and researched. Identifying who the research is 'useful' for, as well as why and how it is useful, uncovers who gets benefit but also who has most to gain, or most to lose, in the researcher-researched relationship. Students also come to understand reciprocity in terms of an exchange of specialist knowledge – though the students may be becoming experts in method and theory in the study of religion they are not the experts in place. Here we see the interplay between a *place-based pedagogy* which enables students to understand and apply theory in a locality, and *reciprocal research relationships* which enable students to understand the implications of their research, and the limitations of their own expertise.

One of the advantages students most commonly articulate concerning the Mapping module is the 'making sense' of both the locality and of the subject of study, through undertaking the visits. This extends as far as thinking about the nature of 'place' itself. One of the key early activities for students undertaking the Religious Mapping of Leeds is the establishment of the boundaries for the 'place' they are researching. Boundary is clearly significant in the identification of place but it quickly becomes apparent to students that boundaries are not uncontroversial. The named neighbourhood may even have different boundaries in different governmental documents, it may cause disagreement and even argument among residents about the edges of their 'place' (after all, whether your house for sale falls in one neighbourhood or another can have a marked impact on its value!). More importantly for understanding the nature of place, students quickly become aware that the place can experience extension in space and/or time. The taken for granted movement of people through commuting for work, worship or leisure quickly becomes analytically significant, and the social construction of place becomes almost impossible to effectively map. This process of seeking and failing to locate the 'boundary' is important to student learning in helping them to engage with the complexity of place and therefore with the local political significance of place.

Lastly, the most recent development is the External Placement module. This module was explicitly developed as an opportunity for students to do something which was of value to a group or organisation in the local area. In this module the student continues to develop and explore their own role as 'expert' in the study of religion – and this is a final year module from which students most explicitly gain skills which support their employability. Students usually provide an output for the organisation as a result of the placement. This is usually an academically informed account of a specific issue but can also be material such as an audit tool, a handbook or guidance document, or material for a website. Examples include research into attitudes to health promotion work in places of worship, evaluation and development of guidance material on religion for public workers, developing an oral history archive about a place of worship, researching the impact of religious identity on public housing issues and contributing to a museum blog on issues regarding religion. This material is produced to meet a specific need which the organisation are unable to address themselves. Partner organisations are varied but include charities, local government and museums. The outputs are carefully supervised by academic staff as well as by the partner organisation. For assessment purposes the student also produces an academic reflection on the placement, and this is often shared with the placement provider as well. Unlike the Mapping reports – where the focus of research is usually collaboratively developed by students and the community link – the External Placement is almost entirely driven by the placement provider. For the student, the analytical and theoretical task is in making sense of these 'needs' within an understanding of religion in British public life.

These modules as a group are distinctive in leading to outputs which are shared with the community and beyond. Religious Mapping of Leeds reports, the best level one Religion in Modern Britain

fieldwork reports, and outputs arising from placements, are regularly added to the growing 'Religion in Leeds' resource of the Community Religions Project website. Work undertaken by undergraduate scholars and students interns[3] to support research projects is also made available via the website. Materials and reports are also forwarded directly to placement providers, community links and research participants. For the students the website provides them with publicly available evidence of the high quality work they have produced. Knowing work will be shared with external organisations also raises their awareness of issues of power, representation and responsibility in research. However, as well as the evident intellectual and employability benefits to the *students* of the approach adopted at the University of Leeds via the Community Religions Project, a further dimension which will be evident already is the benefit to the *community*.

Place-based pedagogy is concerned with learning and teaching rooted in place, but in the undergraduate study of religion it is possible for us to do more than fill the passive receptacles of our students with knowledge about and of 'places'. Instead, and indeed demanded by the employability agenda of UK higher education, we can see our students as developing skills and expertise which will equip them beyond their undergraduate experience. At Leeds the move from 'research-led teaching' to 'research-based learning' has been embedded across curricula in the past two years, but has been integral to the undergraduate study of religion for decades. This is partly because of the focus on locality studies and particularly the place-based pedagogy which has been adopted in key modules, but also is rooted in the reciprocity which is encouraged in the place-based studies – the active rather than passive engagement with people and communities of faith, or with agencies required to engage with people and communities of faith. Having introduced the key features of the Community Religions Project approach to learning and teaching, I will now turn to locating this work within the literature of place-based pedagogy and reciprocal research relations in order to demonstrate both the particular benefits of this approach, but also the ways in which engagement between these two features can develop and benefit the work which undergraduates undertake.

Place-Based Pedagogy

In articulating place-based pedagogy there are a variety of key issues to note, and some challenges arising from the variety of ways in which is it conceptualised. An example definition, from Estey, provides a starting point for considering what is meant:

> Place-based educational methods decenter the traditional classroom as the sole locus of learning and emphasize varied spatial frameworks which include undeveloped natural environments and built environments encompassing rural, suburban or urban communities (2014:125)

Key to Estey's definition here is the word 'environment'. The historical roots of what he describes as place-based education is largely in environmental education, concerned with the physical environment of the forest or the city. In the context of study of religions, it is the latter part of his definition – the communities which are encompassed by such environments – which can become particularly significant for place-based pedagogy. In this sense the approach adopted shares territory with a focus on 'living religion' (Gregg and Scholefield, 2015) which privileges what people actually believe and do, rather than essentialised 'representations' of religions. Whereas 'living religion' has a tendency to focus on the individual, and does not necessarily engage with the situatedness of experience, the place-based approach focusses on the situated nature of believing and doing, the

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[3] Who are paid employees who support specific research projects, see the Community Religions project website for examples.

places and spaces of community and how they structure religious belonging and identity. It is usually through engaging with communities of place that undergraduates understand the significance of the spaces and environments, and this engagement with the communities – with people rather than rocks or buildings - foregrounds the ethical dimension to the activity.

Gruenewald (2003) in his case for the development of a 'A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education' draws out the inherently political nature of what he describes as 'place-conscious' education. Although primarily concerned with school education, and using his approach to critique dominant US patterns of measuring educational attainment, he makes several useful points which relate to the application of place-based pedagogies. Firstly, drawing on the work of Casey he notes (not uncontroversially) that 'places are social constructions', and that 'it is people and cultures that invest places – ecosystems, oak trees, nature itself – with meaning' (2013:626). Most significantly, in considering the ethical implications of place-based pedagogy, Gruenewald argues that:

> [t]he gradual process of taking our socially constructed places for granted is deeply pedagogical. We fail to recognize that a place is an expression of culture and that it represents the outcome of human choices and decisions, that its present state is one of many possible outcomes. When we fail to consider places as products of human decisions, we accept their existence as noncontroversial or inevitable, like the falling of rain or the fact of the sunrise. Moreover, when we accept the existence of places as unproblematic – places such as the farm, the bank, the landfill, the strip mall, the gated community, and the new car lot – we also become complicit in the political processes, however problematic, that stewarded these places into being and that continue to legitimize them. Thus places produce and teach particular ways of thinking about and being in the world. They tell us the way things are, even when they operate pedagogically beneath a conscious level (2013:627)

In the context of study of religion adding the word 'church' or 'synagogue' to the list of places in this quotation sets up some interesting and challenging points for reflection. We might reflect on how places of worship are seen as problematic features of landscape, with controversies about new building or the preservation of unused building being significant features of public discourse about religion. However, for the current discussion what matters most is the extent to which these places as listed by Gruenewald only have significance in the way people engage with and articulate them. Although the student may come across the farm and draw conclusions about the political and ethical significance, it is only through research with people who own, work in, live nearby or police the *place* that the full social and mental significance of the *space* is articulated (Casey, 1996; Knott, 2005; Lefebvre 1991). To this extent we can see how as soon as places are understood as socially constructed spaces they have a pedagogic significance which goes beyond the geographical learning and instead draws students into considerations of their role, the nature of space and place, and the theoretical and conceptual basis of their discipline.

Research Ethics and Reciprocal Research Relations

The student account of place, where it draws on human accounts, is clearly ethically significant and raises questions about agency, ownership and representation. This ethical significance is accentuated when the place-based learning undertaken by the student is independent. However, some accounts of place-based, experiential and other forms of learning in the study of religion can articulate a valuable learning opportunity which is nevertheless largely passive and which provides little opportunity for the student to actively engage with ethically and epistemologically charged issues about agency, ownership and representation. Studies which otherwise take seriously the

pedagogic benefit of learning 'in the field' often fail to engage with the relative passivity of both the researcher (the student) and the researched (the local resident). The student experiences religion through the teacher's organisation and decision making, and comes into contact with people of faith through the conversations the teacher establishes. The teacher's role is that of interpreter and translator – the community member and the student remain largely passive. This pattern, not necessarily described as place-based pedagogy, is evident in many contexts (accounts of this type of approach can be found in Gregg and Scholefield, 2015 and Robinson and Cush 2010). There are clearly significant benefits in this 'teacher-led' learning experience. Students benefit from the experience of engagement with community members and places, through the sense of 'real-world' significance of the classroom studies, and through the problematisation of the normative model of religions which is presented in traditional curricula. However, there is relatively limited engagement with the ethical implications of the visit. It is notable for instance that in Gregg and Scholefield's excellent student guide to fieldwork in the study of religion, research ethics are only discussed in relation to independent fieldwork (2015). The potential ethical significance of the impact of the student research visit on the community and individuals they come into contact with, and the ethical significant of any research output, is left largely in the hands of the teacher. As Richman and Alexander (2006: 164) note:

> Research performed with and by undergraduates poses a specific set of ethical challenges. These challenges are often overlooked by the research community because it is assumed that undergraduate student researchers do not have a significant impact on the research community and that their projects are not host to research posing important ethical issues.

I would add that it is often assumed that work undertaken by student researchers does not have a significant impact on the local community where the research is carried out. However, work undertaken in the Community Religions Project demonstrates both that such research can be valuable to local communities and also that, by engaging with reciprocity, students can be alerted to the ethical issues in research and challenged to reflect on their role and responsibilities. It is fundamentally the responsibility of the teacher to support students in this process. Not just through supervision and training but also through valuing the work students produce. As Valentine argues '…as teachers we have a responsibility to give students the skills to navigate their own ethical maps' (2005: 486).

As I have endeavoured to indicate, despite being hugely valuable to the students it is not clear in all accounts of place-based, experiential or locality studies that the potential or perceived benefit to the 'place' and its people have been properly understood and engaged with. Equally, it is not clear to what extent the student is able to actively engage with the ethical significance, or the 'risk' to communities that the relationship may entail. Often run by volunteers, with limited resources, the desire to educate others about their religion is usually the key determinant of a community's engagement with student visits. For the community members the interest of a university department and the visit of a large number of young adults with an interest in religion can be a marker of prestige, and serves to validate the account that the community gives of itself. But, of course, the student is then a passive receptor of this (often dominant) account. The student may note the ethical issues here, about excluded voices and the way a normative account may be articulated, but they are unlikely to actively engage with the 'representation' that is occurring (Gregg and Scholefield, 2015: 8), and this ethical dimension to the relationship. Indeed, the student's questioning assumes knowledge on the part of the believer, and assumes the student can only receive rather than critique, or even more excitingly – as developed in the Community Religions Project – become a co-creator of knowledge and scholarship. Given the political dimensions outlined

above, there is a curious passivity in the 'visit' approach to place-based pedagogy. Both the student and the community being researched are managed by the teacher co-ordinating the contact. The researched respond to questions, and present information they wish the researcher to hear. The student as researcher receives and accounts for this presentation – critiquing and analysing in a text which may only be shared (through assessment processes) with the teacher who is the main agent in the interaction. Although of course this is characterising a possibly extreme case of this 'visit' model of place-based pedagogy it is a useful way of underlining the point which I am pursuing here – that the ethical significance of this contact is both under explored and under analysed.

Much of the literature on place-based pedagogy and some on experiential learning engages to some extent with the notion that student should provide some benefit to the places and people they engage with. Carlson, for instance, describes students engaging in a day of 'community service' as part of their learning (1998: 125-6). Glennon (2004) uses participation in social justice action as a course component in religious ethics. However, in each of these cases what is notably missing is the sense that the academic work the students produce might itself be the vehicle for this benefit – in much the same way as we might consider our own scholarly endeavours and outputs to be of 'benefit' to those we research. In both the Glennon and the Carlson example the pedagogy is more instructional than facilitative, and so the action which is of benefit to the community is required of the student – and is in itself part of the course – but is not the assessed output. In the approach which we take at Leeds the students have required outcomes (a report, a community presentation), but this is both the academic outcome for assessment and the benefit to the community. Importantly, the students are independent – they are supervised and facilitated, having been trained, but they are responsible for establishing, developing and reciprocating their community based research relations. Reciprocity here is understood as going 'beyond mitigating or limiting negative effects, to establishing reciprocity between ourselves and the individuals and communities we study' (Herman and Mattingley, 1999: 220). Providing access to the output the student produces (subject to it being of sufficient quality) is understood to be a way of establishing a reciprocal relationship with the research participants.

An approach to research which is orientated towards reciprocity is, to some extent at least, inherently political – in the sense of exploring the dynamics of power relationships in the researcher/researched relationship. At its most basic reciprocity might involve providing some support or work for an organisation such as providing research in relation to a concern, or providing specialist assistance which a group or organisation lacks. At its most radical however the subjects of research and the researchers become co-creators of knowledge, sharing their expertise towards a common goal, and in this sense the model of reciprocal research relations that I am identifying can come close to 'participatory research'. However, unlike participatory research models which can be criticised for their problematic conceptualizations of power and emancipation (Pain, 2004), and which can be poorly suited to the type of research conducted in study of religion, reciprocity does not require active participation in planning and conduct of the research, but requires instead the active engagement of the researcher in producing 'benefit' (diversely understood) to the research participants. In the same way that researchers can understand themselves as actively engaging with research participants in this way, I am arguing here that undergraduates, as 'developing experts' can do so as well – and that this has been the most tangible and beneficial outcome of the learning opportunities which are the backbone of the Community Religions Project.

Noting the long standing debate in the biomedical sciences about the 'duty' to be a research participant (Harris, 2005) it is valuable at this point to reflect on what the benefit to the community member might be in taking part in research. As with much research in the Arts and Humanities we

might argue that the work is of benefit in itself, and so long as the participant is not placed under undue stress, and participates freely, then this is the limitation of our ethical responsibility. Indeed, as has already been noted, many participants might themselves be grateful for the opportunity to tell others (particularly young people) about themselves. Yet it is easy to imagine how this can quickly become problematic. Leeds is a large and diverse city but nevertheless, when we send out up to 100 students to undertake independent fieldwork they may have an impact on any one individual community that is excessive, and strains the relationship with a community, organisation or individual. If community contacts finds themselves answering many emails and dealing with many visitors asking questions it quickly becomes reasonable to ask whether this is an excessive burden, particularly when there is no tangible outcome for the participating communities. So what might tangible outcomes look like?

Although I agree with Gallagher et al in their paper *Undergraduate Research Involving Human Subjects Should not be Granted Ethical Approval Unless it is Likely to be Publishable Quality* (2013) I feel they miss an important point about what 'publishable' might mean. In their terms only work published in the academic sphere is relevant – only this work can justify the input the research participant volunteers - yet in the Community Religions Project we have found that making student work publicly available via the Community Religions Project website provides the benefit to participants with can outweigh the risk of wasted time that Gallagher et al. identify as a concern. Even with the first year reports produced in the Religion in Modern Britain module, students can point to the website to show when they are seeking to achieve, the community can see information about themselves archived and publicly available. Permission to make reports public is always sought and, where a response is received, respondents often ask for the link so they can share the report with their community. Mapping reports develop this basic idea of reciprocity (which might be summarised as 'show me yours, I'll show you mine'!) and, as will be shown below, create the conditions for reciprocity which is rooted in engagement with a community of place.

Examples of reciprocity in the Religious Mapping of Leeds

In order to illustrate what 'reciprocal research relations' amount to in the approach adopted through the Community Religions Project, I will return here to looking at the curriculum and specifically the Religious Mapping module. There are three key points at which final year students involved in the Religious Mapping of Leeds engage with issues of reciprocity in their project – their initial meeting with their community link, each point at which they introduce a participant to the project, and at the point where they present their findings. When they are initially introduced to their community link the students are required to discuss what would be useful outcomes of the project for the community link. This happens within a context where students receive training in research ethics that encourages them to reflect on issues of power, representation and risk. In some cases the response from the community link is just that they will be interested to see what the students find, and in these cases the theme for the project emerges in discussion over a period of time. Sometimes however, the community link has very definite ideas about what they'd like to get out of the project. This can be very specific – what does 'community' mean to people in Leeds city centre (to support the work of a minister trying to understand what it means to minister in a city centre)? How has religion changed since the last study of our area (to provide more detail to support funding bids and other work)? Sometimes it can be more diffuse – what matters to people? Do local residents even know we're here? Importantly, this conversation clarifies for the link person that the students will be gathering data that will be publicly available, and therefore might be of 'use' in their work.

To some extent this conversation is revisited every time the students introduce the project to a new participant. Asking for information and participation is easier, and the project more valid, if the

participant can recognise a potential output. However, this also opens up a challenge to the original question – a different participant might challenge the view of the community link and may challenge the authority of the link to identify what is 'useful' for the community. Students must independently negotiate these conversations. Sharing their experience afterwards, in regular supervisions, it is clear how valuable this is to student understanding of the peculiarities of place. Issues such as the power dynamics between perceived leaders, or the way different religions vie for visibility in a locality, must be analysed in order to deepen understanding both of the place and of religion.

The point at which students present their findings to the local community is often a good measure of the success (or otherwise) of a project. Successful projects will have a good number and range of community members and participants, and will lead to challenging and interesting questions. Sometimes students express amazement at how seriously their findings are taken – despite their oft repeated statements that this is 'only' a student project. The power dynamics of the relationship are again evident. After one presentation, during the questions and answers, the community link (who had read the draft report) addressed the students to tell them 'What we're going to do as a result of your report'. The link clearly felt that the student account deserved to be recognised as informing practice, and that in answering a question set by the community link, the community link now had a responsibility to take this learning forward. In another, and more challenging, example a senior police officer asked the students what he should do as a result of what they had found. Students experienced a changed power dynamic – a person in a position of power was recognising that the student findings might be significant. Student ability to articulate their role, and their position, were vital. In another instance, attendees challenged the findings, despite in some cases being the (anonymised) individuals who were referenced in the report in support of the findings. Again students had to engage with the impact of their account and the peculiarly malleable perception of 'the truth'. They were able to turn the challenge around, in a context of co-creation of knowledge, to ask the challenger how they would have differently articulated the results. What each of these examples show is that the research students undertake can be useful, and sometimes challenging, for local communities. This is of significance both pedagogically and ethically. As has been clearly identified, students are developing skills and analysing material which extends their learning. They are also involved in a reciprocal relationship with participants which demands their ethical awareness and their careful negotiation of the power relationship between observer and observed.

The risks and challenges of reciprocity

Reciprocal research relationships provide a context for new and challenging critical engagement in the study of religion. However, developing reciprocal research relationships between undergraduate students and communities of place are not without their risks. Although some of these risks are common to the experience of researching in communities, the fact that these are undergraduate students – often young and relatively inexperienced – requires an engagement with the ethical responsibility of the teacher in supporting this level of independence.

One of the issues which students quickly become sensitive to in the level one Religion in Modern Britain module, and which become more pronounced in the final year projects, is that community partners can have complex reasons for wishing to engage with students. One which students find most challenging is that the organisation can see the opportunity for contact as a conversion opportunity. Sometimes this is overt, students are asked if they 'have found Jesus', what they believe, or challenged on the beliefs they express (of course, sometimes through their dress, not through their words). This is a significant learning opportunity for students – both in terms of their ability to manage their positionality as a researcher (and we spend a significant amount of time in the curriculum exploring these issues) and in terms of understanding the people and the place which

they are researching. Importantly, this is an ethical issue – it is about the negotiation of power between researcher and researched. The student though, as a relatively inexperienced researcher, requires particular support to manage the complex power relationship and this is achieved through supervision and teaching sessions. This ethical issue is therefore shared, and to some extent dispersed, by the complex web of inter-relationships between teacher, student and research participant. Interestingly, despite hundreds (if not thousands) of discrete research projects this concern has never moved beyond the student's sense of disquiet in being challenged about their own beliefs. Concern about the potential risk to student emotional and psychological well being remains, and requires of teaching staff significant and careful supervision of students undertaking research projects.

A further risk in reciprocity is excessive expectations. Organisations and community links may expect students to produce professional quality outputs, and may expect students to be available more constantly and consistently then their timetable allows. Equally, students can expect that organisations will be freely available to support them (as identified earlier). This risk is handled at Leeds through very clear communication which includes, in the External Placement module, a written agreement about health and safety on the placement between student, organisation and University. There is often work for the educator to do in educating the community partner about the limitations on student time and also on the nature of their outputs. Although to date our students have produced very high quality work we would not make poor quality reports publicly available. However, much must rely on trusting the student. Within the highly regulated and risk averse higher education sector it can sometimes feel that allowing students to work with external organisations is an unacceptable risk. The experience at Leeds has been that where students are properly trained, effectively supervised, and there is clear communication between all parties, risk is mitigated. In the very rare instance that an organisation or individual may have reservations about a student conducting a fieldwork visit there is always a supervisor as a point of contact (clearly identified on the information sheet students must provide to organisations and individuals).

There are, of course, many risks and challenges which are shared with any research project – undergraduate or other. Issues of access, negotiation of project outcomes, ensuring training and other skill development, as well as concerns about the 'politics of naming' (Guenther, 2009) the clarity of roles and the clarity of ownership of research outcomes. All of these provide valuable learning opportunities and opportunities for analysis in any particular project for an undergraduate researcher as they would for a professional researcher. For the undergraduate though the responsibility must lie with the supervisor – who is ultimately responsible for ensuring appropriate ethical approval, health and safety risk assessment and of course academic quality.

These features of reciprocity, both the benefits and the risk, relate to the place-based pedagogy within which they are applied. Students occupy the space of Leeds just as much as places of worship and people of faith. Estey notes that in his own context, the place-based approach assists students in their active engagement with 'place' and 'places':

> The intent is to help undermine a type of subject/object distinction in which students abstract the places they visit and fail to make the connections between those places and Brooklyn College or between those places and their larger context. (2014: 127)

The power relationship between researcher and researched is part of a broader political context where relationships between students and local residents (or 'town and gown' as it is sometimes described) can be contested and challenging. Students can be associated with noise and inconvenience. They arrive in lots of cars in late September and leave behind lots of mess in June.

Yet through the development of reciprocal research relations in their curriculum students provide benefit and engage with the place which they may otherwise see only as the accidental location of their University. Place-based pedagogy is inherently political, as Gruenewald argues, but through reciprocity it can provide a context for negotiating challenging relationships. A critical place-based pedagogy which utilises reciprocal research relations is sensitive to power relations and uses them as the basis for facilitated learning. Without reciprocity place-based pedagogy can risk becoming passive (the 'visit') and making unacceptable demands on participants. Through reciprocity the research participant can at least see tangible benefit arising from their engagement and at best can become the co-creator of new and challenging research.

Conclusion

This article has pursued the claim that, in the study of religion at least, place-based pedagogy has increased educational significance where this is a shared focus on reciprocity. Study of religions is, when place-based, a fundamentally human enterprise. It is about people engaging with place and with one another. As such, the people in the place are not static or passive – they are not of the same value or significance as geological formations or traffic flows. Instead they are giving the student data and insight, in their interactions they are actively contributing to the learning and often the ultimate qualification of the student. Without reciprocity – without receiving something in return – we risk alienating and abusing the communities we seek to understand. If we do not teach this fundamental insight to undergraduate students we are not properly inducting them into the place-based study of religion. This discussion has uncovered some of the weaknesses in the 'visit' model of place-based or experiential learning, particularly in terms of the limitations it places on student learning and experience by diminishing responsibility and ethical awareness. This suggests there is more to be considered about the epistemological, ontological and ethical issues raised by engagement with place and with people. Lastly, this article has demonstrated throughout that the place-based and reciprocal approach to student research has benefits beyond the academic. This approach to the study of religion curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop, demonstrate and hone skills which are transferable to employment contexts. Given the current focus, particularly in the UK, on the 'employability' agenda it is clear this approach may satisfy a number of objectives for the undergraduate religious studies curriculum.

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