

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 31 – Theology and Religious Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Special Divine Action and Accelerating Insight among School Teachers and Pupils		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Dr Andrew Pinsent	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Research Director, Ian Ramsey Centre, Faculty of Theology and Religion	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  Oct 2009-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> Oct 2014-31 Dec 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Dr Andrew Pinsent has led three international public-facing outreach projects – ‘Special Divine Action’ (2014-2016), ‘Accelerating Insight’ (2017-2020), and ‘Philosothon Expansion’ (2019-2022) – all of which have engaged the concept of ‘insight’ and its implications both for the learning process and teaching practice in pre-university education. Pinsent led a series of hundreds of events aimed at teachers and headteachers, harnessing his work to assist these stakeholders to understand the value and importance of insight in teaching. More than 30,000 headteachers, teachers and school students from across four continents attended these events; and surveys indicate that a large proportion of these participants gained a new appreciation of the value and importance of insight. Furthermore, teachers were inspired to adopt practices that would foster the acceleration of insight in contexts of secondary education, and students benefitted in sometimes life-changing ways.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The initial focus of Pinsent’s underpinning research was Special Divine Action, that is, the various ways in which God purportedly interacts with creation in general and human beings in particular. In a paper on the notion of Special Divine Insight, Pinsent argued that purported divine inspiration often resembles insight, described by the philosopher Bernard Lonergan as a ‘higher viewpoint’, or as something equivalent to a ‘Eureka! moment’ [1]. Pinsent’s research has reflected upon the importance of insight, which is associated with paradigm shifts in understandings of science, such as changes in the conception of the cosmos [2]. Such moments of insight are also associated with transformative events in religion, such as the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christianity, an event associated with light (Acts 9:3), which is also a metaphor for enlightenment.</p> <p>More generally, insights are arguably the most challenging and valuable events to understand and harness in teaching. Considering the links between insight and teaching, Pinsent has examined the question of how to encourage and accelerate insights in others. In some of his writings [1], he has identified the difficulty and perhaps impossibility of engineering or programming insights, a fact that remains at the heart of many difficulties in developing artificial intelligence. When combined with his previous work on the connection of the theological gift of understanding with the purported covenantal relationship with God [3], Pinsent’s research has also highlighted three conditions that may help to accelerate insights. First, <i>metaphors</i> and <i>stories</i> play a key role in communicating and triggering insights as illustrated, for example, by Jesus’ frequent use of parables [4, 5]. Second, there is the value of <i>second persons</i> in accelerating insight, especially in a state of what psychologists today call ‘joint attention’ or shared awareness of shared focus between persons. In this joint attention, a teacher aligns</p>		

psychologically with the student, to understand as the student understands; the teacher then introduces clues, removes distractions, and throws out pointed hints that may catalyse or trigger the student's new and higher perspective [1]. Third, as noted in a paper on Catholic perspectives on human biotechnological enhancement, the student needs at least sufficient *intellectual humility* to submit to new insights that may challenge preconceptions [6].

These factors in the acceleration of insight helped Pinsent to interpret a famous story of Hans Christian Andersen, *The Snow Queen* [1]. In this story, a boy called Kai is an expert in subjects like counting and geometry but has started to despise living things and has become cold and indifferent to his friend Gerda and his grandmother. In this mood, he is trapped by the Snow Queen in a cold and self-contained prison of the mind, continually trying and failing to spell the word "Eternity" by re-arranging blocks of ice. Only the tears of his friend Gerda, who has been searching for him throughout most of the story, melt the splinters blocking his eyes and heart, giving him the insight for the puzzle to be solved and to walk with her out of the trap. These details underline the seriousness of being trapped by frozen representations of the world and the importance of teaching, carried out by second persons, for accelerating insights to escape. Moreover, the fact that these details are communicated in the form of an insightful and memorable story, *The Snow Queen*, itself validates the importance of metaphors and stories in communicating insights.

Much of this body of research into insight was made possible as part of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation for the project 'Special Divine Action' [i], which also funded a significant public engagement initiative as outlined below. The ideas generated by this research then became the basis of two further projects devoted principally to working with teachers and schools, funded by awards from the other two Templeton foundations. The first, 'Accelerating Insight', ran from 2018-2020, while the second, 'Philosothon Expansion in the UK', started in 2019 and is ongoing [ii, iii].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

*All publications single-authored except [6]; all available on request*

1. [Journal article] "Special Divine Insight: Escaping the Snow Queen's Palace," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2015: 173-196. DOI: [10.24204/ejpr.v7i4.93](https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v7i4.93).
2. [Chapter] "Eyesight with Insight: Cosmology and Second-Person Inspiration." In *Creatio ex nihilo*, edited by Gary Anderson and Markus Bockmuehl (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2018): 347-365. ISBN-10: 0268102538.
3. [Authored Book] *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (Routledge, 2012). ISBN 9780415736176.
4. [Journal article] "Spell-Breaking with Revitalizing Metaphors," *Res Philosophica*, Vol. 96, No. 1, 2019: 3-15. DOI: [10.11612/resphil.1746](https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.1746).
5. [Journal article] "God, Elvish, and Secondary Creation," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2019: 191-204, DOI: [10.24204/ejpr.v11i2.2620](https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v11i2.2620).
6. [Journal article] "Catholic Perspectives on Human Biotechnological Enhancement," co-authored with Sean Biggins, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2019: 187-199. DOI: [10.1177/0953946819826769](https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946819826769).

#### **Grants and Awards:**

- i. Pinsent (PI) John Templeton Foundation for the 'Special Divine Action' project, 2014-2016 (GBP1,680,000). ID# 41876.
- ii. Pinsent (PI) Templeton World Charity Foundation for the project 'Accelerating Insight: An Oxford-Templeton Project for Schools,' 2018-20 (GBP300,000). Grant number TWCF0217.
- iii. Templeton Religion Trust for the project 'Philosothon Expansion in the UK', 2019-2021 (GBP160,000).

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Pinsent's presentations on insight, using his interpretation of The Snow Queen (outlined above), have reached thousands of beneficiaries in four continents. Since 2014, Pinsent has spoken on the theme of accelerating insight at hundreds of outreach events among school teachers and pupils, at which he has applied his research findings to reflect both upon the nature of learning and perception, and the role of the teacher in the learning process. For the first project, 'Special Divine Action', approximately 100 outreach events were held in the UK and USA in 2014-16, attended by approximately 11,398 teachers and students, with over 12,000 additional subsequent online viewers. Most of these were led by Pinsent or by colleagues within the Faculty of Theology and Religion, including Dr Tim Mawson and Prof. Alister McGrath [A]. The second project, 'Accelerating Insight' (2017-2020), ultimately held 4 seminars for headteachers, 12 training days for teachers, and 96 events for Gifted-and-Talented, GCSE, and A-level students. Together, these 112 'Accelerating Insight' events reached 173 headteachers, 2,603 teachers, and 18,806 students in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, with a single event also in Argentina [B]. The third project, 'Philosothon Expansion' (2019-2022), which is pioneering a format of timed explorations of major philosophical themes among small groups of school pupils, is ongoing [C]. All three projects have directed their activity at school teachers and pupils, and have promoted open-minded, thoughtful and interdisciplinary inquiry relating to the 'big questions' of life and the universe, as first pioneered by the 'Special Divine Action' project.

In total, events associated with these 3 projects have so far directly reached over 30,000 participants. Key points have also been distilled into a 3-minute video and a 1-minute cartoon, which are hosted on YouTube and have reached a yet wider online audience [D]. Other especially notable events associated with these projects include presentations to the following audiences (the figures are approximations): 70 Catholic high school teachers at a Notre Dame University workshop (USA); 110 teachers at the Academy Conference for Teachers and Exam Boards (2016); 150 teachers at the School of Education, Universidad Austral, Argentina (2017); 30 headteachers at the Anglican Academy and Secondary Heads Conference (2018); and 390 RE professionals including 24 headteachers and 242 teachers at the Australian Institute of Theological Education's Third National Religious Education Symposium in Sydney (2019) [E]. They also include Pinsent's participation in a Q&A session at the Palace of Westminster in 2016, invited by the Office of the Minister of State for Schools, to discuss the Religious Studies curriculum. See sources [A] and [B] for the full lists of more than 200 events in several countries. Pinsent's schools-facing events have also continued amidst the Covid-19 lockdown of recent months. For instance, recently in Nov 2020, he contributed to running online 'learning labs' for several hundred secondary school students, held, in conjunction with long-term partner organisation Academy Conferences: a UK-based educational enterprise that works with Gifted-and-Talented students.

**Changed understandings of insight and the learning process among teachers:** The first area in which Pinsent's extensive outreach activities have had an impact is in enhancing teachers' perception of the notion of insight, and its meaning and importance in the learning process. Pinsent's events have both encouraged reflection on the importance of inspiration or insight in student learning, and have served to validate teachers' own central and indispensable role not simply as transmitters of facts but as second persons who stimulate 'Eureka! Moments' on the part of their students. This is reflected, for example, in the reflections of the attendees at a presentation to 70 teachers by Pinsent on 'Science, Insight and Inspiration' at the Institute of Church Life, University of Notre Dame (USA) in June 2016, who observed how "it was nice to have the beauty of [our] own work as teachers reinforced" [F]. Another teacher at the same event remarked, "I kept having thoughts about how this played out in my classroom - when the students have those 'a-ha' moments, but even, more, why they don't have those." Another teacher remarked, "taking two ideas that we thought we understood and looking at them from a new perspective was helpful. Teachers strive for 'a-ha' moments and it's so important to teach students what they are and to recognize how to remain open to them" [F].

Reflecting upon a similar presentation at the School of Education at Austral University, Argentina's leading private university, the Director of Studies at the School of Education remarked, "one of the things that most caught my attention was the consideration that 'any representation can become a prison of the mind when it is so powerful that reality is no longer believed to exist outside the representation', with respect to the 'mystery of understanding'. This

invited me to reflect about the need to stretch beyond the limits of an analysis performed from one's own discipline or from single point of view..." [G]. Another teacher claimed that, "your presentations... reviewed and refined our understanding... your analogy of the black rock as a top of the iceberg... was spot on. All of your presentations focused a light on your subjects in a way that was clear" [F].

Following a presentation by Pinsent to approximately 300 professionals and leaders in religious education at the BBI-TAITE National Religious Education Symposium in Sydney in 2019, the Director of the Irish Centre for Religious Education at Dublin City University remarked, "I greatly appreciated Dr. Pinsent's opening up of the story of the Snow Queen as a way of dialoguing about reason and love, ugliness and beauty, and the limitations of the specific with the wonder of eternity. Told in this way, this great story provides an imaginative entry into themes which religious education in a contemporary world must deal with" [G]. These and many other reflections elicited in feedback suggest how teachers absorbed and reflected upon Pinsent's teachings of insight, its elicitation and benefits.

**Enhancement of teaching practice:** The second domain in which Pinsent's research has had a positive effect is in the professional practice of teachers. Respondents indicate that the events made many teachers rethink aspects of their vocation, especially with regard to their role in the generation of insight in students. For example, at the event for teachers at the University of Notre Dame (USA) in 2016, teachers had clearly picked up the importance of metaphor and its role in understanding. Elaborating upon what they had learnt from Pinsent's presentations, one teacher wrote, "specifically the use of metaphors for understanding and using the humanities." Another similarly answered, "especially the importance of metaphor for understanding," noting that this "will definitely impact my teaching [with my] increased use of metaphor to help students understand" [F]. Another remarked that s/he wanted "to read more [Hans Christian] Andersen and use more metaphors in my teaching" [F].

Others commented that this event made them consider themes of understanding and insight in new ways. One remarked that this event "will definitely have an impact on my teaching. I will emphasize the human side of understanding in science more" [F]. Another teacher commented on the additional value that the presentation had given to the use of art, music, and literature in the classroom, while another pledged to "use play and art more in the classroom" as a means of generating student understanding [F].

It was also clear that, as a result of the presentations, teachers grasped better the relational aspect of insight that was central to Pinsent's argument. One teacher remarked that, "the discussion of insight as inherently relational struck a chord in me. It will cause me to reevaluate how activities are structured to be more relational" [F]. Another similarly mentioned that the presentation "has helped me to understand the roles of pride and second-person relatedness in insight" [F]. In another instance, a teacher who attended Pinsent's presentation on 'Science, Insight and Inspiration' at Notre Dame made the unexpected comment that "I see myself asking my students to list an insight that they had in class during the week. [This] might be a great way to check [their] understanding and help them to recognize when they are having them." In other words, this teacher wanted to make students more conscious of their own insights, and their significance for their own education [F].

Many teachers also complimented the events for having challenged them intellectually, having "challenged my knowledge", "stretched my mind" and "refreshed my understanding" [F, G, H], while many also pledged to follow up on key ideas and figures discussed by Pinsent by conducting their own "further study and research on these topics" after the event [F, G]. Some participants in 'Special Divine Action' pledged to "consider the perspectives [raised in the events] with my A-level students", while others pledged to "implement" or "try and make use of [the subject matter] in my teaching"; one claimed, "I want to cut some of these ideas down into bitesize pieces to share with pupils" [F]. Others alluded to making substantive changes to teaching content following their exposure to Pinsent's work. For instance, following the Aquinas Lecture at St Charles Borromeo seminary, Cleveland (USA) in 2015, a seminary teacher added, "I have developed a whole course on questions at the crossroads of science and religion. The course was inspired, in part, by Rev. Pinsent" [F].

**Inspired and motivated achievement in students:** An additional aspect of impact arising from Pinsent's schools-focused work is the effect upon the learning of students themselves, due

either to the direct impressions upon students following their own participation in these events, or due to their teachers attending and implementing changes of practice in their classrooms. Teachers of school groups who had attended 'Accelerating Insight' events noted that the students who attended were "buzzing"; that they "enjoyed [the events] immensely"; and that the events "challeng[ed] students to consider what is true and correct in the world... providing students with the tools to assess their thinking" [G]. Other teachers stated that the events strongly "motivated" the students; that the students "enjoyed having their minds stretched"; and that the events provided them with "a good platform to actively participate and share their views" [G].

Similar findings are confirmed in a series of interviews held Dec 2019-Mar 2020 with 13 teachers of student cohorts who had previously attended 'Accelerating Insight' events. In 100% of cases the teachers answered that the events had had a positive impact on their students [H]. As evidence, teachers made the points that: (a) students had subsequently read further articles about the topics raised in the presentations; (b) students had written articles for their school's website; (c) the students had continued "chatting amongst themselves and to myself about the talks"; (d) the students said that the events had been thought provoking; (e) students claimed that they had "enjoyed the challenge and the content"; (f) students involved in the events had subsequently done well in their exams; and also that (g) the students better appreciated that education extended beyond the requirements of the curricula [H].

Following a lecture by Pinsent attached to the 'Accelerating Insight' project at Queens College, Taunton (UK) in 2018, another student took the initiative to write a personal email of thanks, which stated, "I was really excited by the ideas you put forward and the questions you made us ask ourselves... [to see] science and religion as the same concept of the abstract creative thought process is necessary for both. I cannot thank you enough for your lecture. I was very excited coming out of the talk being keen to discuss your views with my teachers" [G]. Several teachers also noted that these events had helped the students to appreciate university studies better, or had made them re-consider their further education choices. One UK teacher even wrote, "My own daughter attended in 2017 and this event was the catalyst for her successful application to study philosophy... She even quoted one of the lectures she heard [at an event] in her UCAS personal statement" [H].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Details of schools-focused events held as part of the 'Special Divine Action' project up to Nov 2016 (112 events) plus attendance figures.
- B. Details of outreach events held as part of the 'Accelerating Insight' project, Oct 2017-Oct 2020 (113 events) plus attendance figures.
- C. Philothon UK website (<https://philothon.co.uk>) and Philothon Expansion information page on Ian Ramsey Centre website (<https://www.ianramseycentre.info/philothon-expansion-in-the-uk>).
- D. Two publicly available YouTube videos hosted by the 'Special Divine Action' project on the theme of inspiration: 'Introduction to Inspiration' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-4bPc71qgc>); and 'Albert Explores Inspiration' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTeHXM1GfWY>), Nov 2016.
- E. Programme for the Australian Institute of Theological Education's Third National Religious Education Symposium (2019).
- F. Feedback questionnaires and testimonials from participants in 'Special Divine Action' events (121 respondents) plus contextual details.
- G. Feedback questionnaires and testimonials from participants in 'Accelerating Insight' project (121 responses).
- H. Copies of 14 interview questionnaires completed by teachers concerning the 'Accelerating Insight' project.