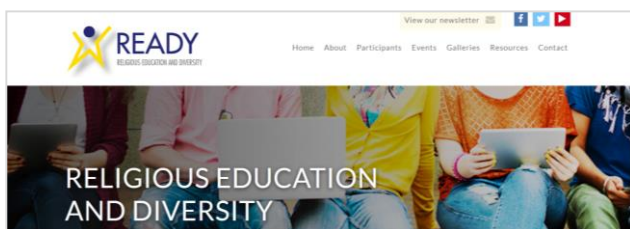


NEWSLETTER

Issue 3 > March 2017

Welcome

...2017! We proudly present our first newsletter of the year. The focus of the project of the last few years has been on exploring, developing and trialling and now we are ready to share even more of our experiences and ideas of what Religious Education and Diversity might look like. You can read about our new website where you will find material and insights into RE and Diversity in the participating countries. There is a discussion between the participants of the projects on the issue of neutrality of RE teachers, information about how we are using social media to promote the project and our recent transnational meeting in London. We also include up to date developments in RE. Enjoy the newsletter and keep informed via our website: www.readyproject.eu



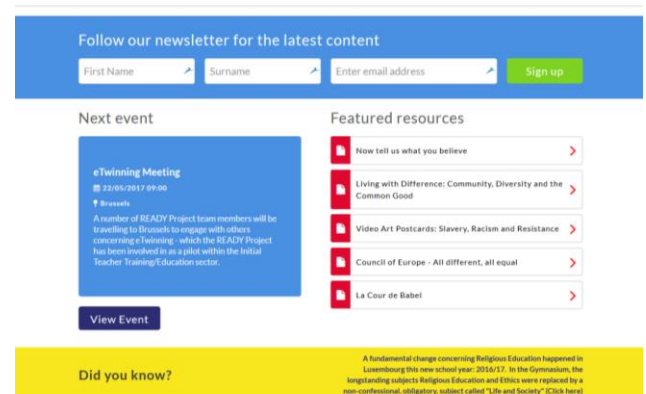
Our new website

Following much preparation, the new READY website launched at the beginning of this year. The range of great functions, resources and in-depth information is impressive and deserves an introduction.

The READY project strives to share information and material via various means including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Direct links to the READY accounts on these sites can be found at the top of the website. This provides a hub with easy access to the different social media platforms and channels of communication.

In addition to using social media to access different actors in various areas in the field of RE, the website also provides access to detailed information and intellectual outputs as well as short introductions to the institutions and academics involved in the READY project. Another highlight is getting to know the student teachers whose voices are found in the discussions, plans and development of RE lessons on diversity within and across borders.

Research from our work can be found in the section "Resources". For example, there is an article written by READY academic Heinz Ivkovic regarding the neutrality of teachers ("Now tell us what you believe") and an overview of RE and RE teacher education in the participating countries.



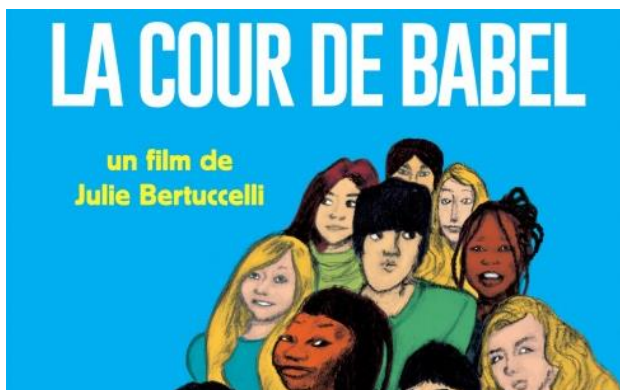
If you are looking for information about how the project works and is developing, you'll find a description in the section "About", and "Galleries" contains pictures taken during key exchange events. Finally, you can also download all newsletters and subscribe to them on the website. We look forward to your first and future visits!

RE lessons taught...

After a short report about RE lessons on diversity in Sweden in our last newsletter, we're keen to provide some insight into the work that has been done in preparing, teaching and reflecting on lessons in other participating countries.

...in Germany

At the Staatliche Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung (Gymnasien) in Tübingen, teacher trainees and staff are working to develop teaching material about "Religion and Diversity" in manifold contexts. Some teaching modules have already been trialled and have received very positive responses. For example, there is a teaching proposal referring to the French documentary "La Cour de Babel" about a "reception" class of young people who come from 24 different countries to Paris. In the film the pupils have a vivid and emotional discussion about the role of religion in their lives and thus the question of which kind of Religious or Ethical Education would be helpful for them is raised.



For more teaching ideas visit the section "resources" on our website.

...in England

Siddiq Khatun, RE PGCE student at UCL, gave a short account of a lesson she taught on Diversity in Christian Worship to a Year 10 class:

When teaching this lesson, pupils were very interested to know about the history of Christianity and the split that occurred. Using their prior knowledge, they were keen to be to share what they knew and were easily involved once they could see the link between History and RE. Regarding Christian worship, different images of worship were shown. The aim was to get them to understand how worship can be so diverse and thus difficult to define.

Then the question, which forms of worship were acceptable, was discussed. When I showed them a video of Pentecostal Christians speaking in tongues, they were confused but also very curious. This gave me a greater opportunity to discuss how prayer could be so diverse.

In addition to the pupils learning about the types of worship, I was pleased to know that pupils had left the class understanding why there was diversity and how it wasn't easy to define worship in one way. Thus for the last objective they were able to conclude that all forms were accurate because it was about the communication itself rather than how.

... in Austria

In the last few months our three student teams devised and tried out a lot of different lesson sequences. Amongst others on Eschatology for a class of 13-14 year old pupils. They started off by exploring different religions, perceptions of God, and core contents of religious traditions with regards to Eschatology. This enabled pupils both to become familiar with other religious traditions and to discover their Protestant identity.

As part of this sequence they paid a visit to a nearby cemetery. Yet, at the same time they found out that differences run not only between different religions, but also between the individuals of the Protestant group itself. It was the fruitful experience of learning about other religions and discovering and strengthening their own identity, which was reflected in vivid discussions.



Iranian refugees talking to pupils in RE class

In another lesson taught on diversity a young Iranian refugee-couple was invited to a class of 13 year old pupils enabling them not only to learn *about*, but *from* others. This was highly appreciated by the class and the guests.

What else is new?

Transnational Partner Meeting London

From Feb. 27th till March 2nd the project team of READY came together for a meeting in London. Besides discussing further steps, planning study visits, multiplier events and publications, the team had the chance to attend a school service in Westminster Abbey as well as meeting the head of Education of the Abbey. The following day they gained an insight into an RE lesson by participating in an observation and an inspiring discussion with the teacher afterwards. For a better impressions of the meeting, visit the gallery on our website and our Facebook page!

READY for new media

A lot of media and documentation has already been produced for the READY project. Student teachers connected via Facebook, photos were uploaded, video presentations are available on YouTube, audio interviews have been transcribed, Prezi presentations viewed and video calls initialized. The READY project is enriched with the possibilities that new and social media present. This level of documentation and discussion is made even more accessible due to the prolific smartphone so please, wherever you are, capture a special moment in Religious Education! It might be a significant moment in a lesson, an idea for RE and Diversity or, as in the photo below, a reflection on the study visit in a Scottish pub!



Peter Kliemann und Jörg Lohrer preparing for a reflection on the study visit in Aberdeen

Can a RE teacher be neutral? A discussion

One of the main topics that comes up within the READY project again and again, is the question if and in which way RE teachers could and should be 'neutral', 'impartial' or 'objective'. So it was a surprising insight, that the term 'truth claim' ('Wahrheitsanspruch') can be closely connected to the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas in the German-speaking discussion and is also for some non-religious colleagues considered to be something positive; especially for British and Scandinavian colleagues, however, "truth claim" may quickly trigger fierce reactions and misunderstandings.

Three READY files which will be uploaded soon on www.readyproject.eu deal explicitly with this controversy:

- A working paper written by Heinz Ivkovits (Vienna) is titled "Now tell us please what you believe. Do RE teachers have to be religious or believers?"
- A file with Vignettes, Spots and Short Reflections of the READY team
- An ongoing controversy between RE teacher students of the Universities of Tübingen (Germany) and Karlstad (Sweden). Starting point was a video message of students from Tübingen:



Just click on the picture to watch the video on youtube!

Visitors of the READY website are warmly invited to join the discussion!

The topical interest of the issue is also shown by the recently published special issue 1/2017 of the British Journal of Religious Education: "Neutrality and Impartiality in RE: An impossible aim?"

Going beyond

All different, all equal

In 2016 the Council of Europe released a revised version of the education pack *All different, all equal*. Initially published in the early 1990s, its call for living peacefully in multicultural societies seems valid today more than ever. "Through a process of intercultural education we seek to enable young people to value differences between people, cultures and outlooks on life" (p. 9). This includes different (religious) beliefs. It gives theoretical background information as well as practical resources for teaching about diversity and equality. For more, visit our [website](#).

RE in India*

India is a vast country. To concisely summarize any aspect of the country is a fool's task. Some of the educational needs, of the population of 1.3 Billion people, are provided to by more than 1.5 million schools in the country (in 2013-2014; from primary to higher secondary). Indian Education is regulated firstly by national law and policies, like the National Policy of Education [NPE] and the National Curriculum Framework [NCF]. The above could be called a common core, which is then interpreted by different school boards to which individual schools would be affiliated. For instance, each Indian State would have its own school board. This school board interprets the common core and develops a syllabus and curricular material.

India is a secular country. In the common core, as described above, there is nothing that could directly be called Religious Education. This means, no Religious Education exists outside the religious school boards and religious schools such as Muslim madaras or Hindu gurukuls. In fact, it is commonly described, both in research literature and when talking to school teachers in India, that there is no Religious Education at all, even in denominational schools.

However, there is content which might be said to concern topics of religion, when looking closer at both syllabi and school practices. In the subject of History religious traditions such as Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity would be described - with a focus on the birth of the respective tradition; possible founder, basic tenets, and so on. Another subject worth mentioning is Peace, described in the common core; or more precisely: in the NCF. It describes a subject that should permeate the whole school environment. (It is, however, up to the individual school boards how this should be done.) Something that is encouraged, is to celebrate each other's festivals. In practice, this would, more often than not, mean specifically religious festivals. To participate in the celebration of each other's religious festivals.

Indeed, that is what I experienced when conducting field research in North India during spring 2016. The common understanding of 'secular' in India is somewhat different from how it's commonly understood in the West. As opposed to a 'distance to religion', the Indian understanding is rather *sarva dharma sambhaṅga*, which could be translated as 'all religions treated equally'. In practice this means that it is somewhat unproblematic to include religious elements of different kinds – e.g. singing of hymns, prayers and mantras; praying; offering incense – as long as the practices performed are not exclusive to any one religion.

In short, content about religious traditions can be found in subjects like History, but there are also other kinds of religious expressions found in schools, which deserves further exploration. It is precisely this that I attempt to do in my PhD project.

by Kristian Niemi (Karlstad University)

* For a longer version with references, please visit:
<http://www.readyproject.mtcserver3.com/uploads/files/1487611793REinIndia.pdf>