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The European Network for Religious Education through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA): Its Policy and Aims

Origins and Key Concerns

The European Network for Religious Education in Europe through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA) was set up in 1999 as a forum for mutual co-operation and reflection on the changing role of religious education in Europe. It brought together scholars from England, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Wales. Scholars engaged in empirical and theoretical research in aspects of religion and education in relation to intercultural issues. The group's commitment was to deal with the educational implications of the changing patterns of religious and secular plurality in European countries. Two perspectives have been important for the group's vision:

- religious contextuality, with a focus on religious life in particular cultural situations and at local levels, and
- religious competence as the ability of a student to negotiate on religious meanings.

The group's first project engaged with the challenges of pluralism and globalisation for European schools, both state and denominational. The book that was published in 2001 (cf. Heimbrock, Scheilke & Schreiner, 2001) included critical essays and research reports related to diversity as a challenge for education in Europe. The book's focus was on the urgency of dealing with everyday challenges related to cultural and religious diversity in the schools of Europe. The book also identifies serious problem areas to be addressed, such as violence, discrimination against minorities, racism, and sexism.

Globalisation and pluralism are decisive trends influencing societies and all areas of education including religious education. The inter-cultural and multi-religious situation in European countries demands a rethinking and re-legitimizing of the existing educational systems in the particular countries. At least two issues are at stake here: 'What can be the contribution of religious education to general education?' and 'What does this mean for a repositioning of state and denominational schools?'

In the chapters of the 2001-book the existing diversity of Europe was shown as enrichment. Each country has its own 'biographical' history in terms of its civil religion and its responses to challenges of globalisation and plurality. This variety provides opportunities to learn from each other by means of an intensive dialogue, but also that there can be added value through bringing these accounts together at a European level.

From the very start ENRECA has dealt with the issues of religious plurality and diversity in a European context. However, Europe is more than the Union, and this wider horizon also includes a global perspective. A key question in this context is how can we better understand the relation between local settings, particular regions and countries, a wider European setting and a global perspective? Moreover, what does this mean for the religious identity formation of children and youngsters in the 21st century?

ENRECA is following the line of the Council of Europe by pointing to the importance of strengthening pluralist democracies, to stimulate the development of active citizenship and to foster greater mutual understanding through intercultural education. We have sympathy for political initiatives that give the religious dimen-

sion in intercultural education more emphasis than usual, as can be seen in the Council of Europe's project: "The new intercultural challenge to education: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe." We recognize that in the recommendations of the COE the main emphasis so far has been on democracy and religious tolerance, including the need for religious education to do justice to democratic expectations. This need has become very obvious in the light of increasing intolerance and violence. Hence we strongly support the values of democracy and tolerance as principles for living together in Europe and see religious education as having an important role in promoting these values.

There is a danger that religious education, although it is firmly rooted in many of the European traditions, might become more and more marginalized and weakened in our education systems. In addition to citizenship, personal outlooks, values, identities and religious orientations should be included (cf. Spinder *et al*, 2003). This may enable citizens-in-becoming to deal constructively and creatively with the experience of cultural and religious plurality in a democratic manner. Children and youngsters need to be supported in order to participate in the relevant debates as part of their religious education (cf. Jackson, 2003). This support must be visible on different levels, within the families, schools, and religious communities (micro level), the context of the respective country (meso level), the international level of the European Union and beyond that on a global scale (macro level).

ENRECA intends to strengthen an awareness of the relationship between citizenship on the one hand and values and religious education on the other. This is becoming increasingly important on a local, national, European and global scale. Research on citizenship education has in general not paid attention to the religious factors involved in the development of civic virtues like tolerance and respect. Consequently, the work of ENRECA can give new impulses to this field of study related for instance to the fostering of interfaith and inter-value dialogue and encounter. The research in this field is often limited to one national context with little international cooperation. ENRECA hopes to develop research models for comparative and integrative studies covering different European countries.

One of the very important issues at the political level is the principle of the separation of church and state, originating from discussions in the nineteenth century. This principle needs to be rethought in the face of globalisation developed by the mass media, economic superstructures, mass transportation and by the impact of religion on a global scale. A separation of the private and religious from the public and secular should be replaced by a new and effective partnership between institutions representing the governments and the religious organisations (cf. Miedema, 2000; Spinder *et al*. 2003, p.55ff.). Recent discussions in France resulting from President Chirac's speech on December 18, 2003 with respect to new politics for the 'laïcité' (see also Debray, 2002) shows the need for an in-depth discussion on the issues surrounding the separation of state and church .

Pedagogical & Political Goals

The first phase of ENRECA, culminating in the publication of the 2001-book, provided evidence for a convergence of religious education in North Western Europe. The main features are an emphasis on the context of inter-religious learning in the life of the school and the wider society and the importance of the life-world of the students. In 2002 the ENRECA-group decided to operate as an on-going research seminar and currently includes scholars from Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, France and Estonia. Seminars focus on the presentation and critical discussion of current research, the exchange of research findings and dis-

cussions of common issues relevant to the European context and evaluating these outcomes on a global scale too. Currently, the work is mainly focused on processes of teaching and learning in religious education. The aim is to put forward contextually based empirical data on what is actually going on at the classroom level and in local communities. The normative aspects of religious education should be based on what is actually going on at primary and secondary level in a diversity of schools in the European countries. The group is committed to involving practitioners in the research process and includes teachers and teacher educators who are engaged in research as well as academics from various relevant fields, professional researchers and PhD students.

A key element of the work of the group is to ensure that research findings are relevant to educational policy makers and practitioners in the represented countries. We also want to address other educational and political decision-makers in European countries and (West-)European fora. This is in line with the position of the *Intereuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS)*, on religious identity formation in schools (Schreiner & Spinder, 1997) and on a Christian view for education in Europe's schools (Spinder *et al.*, 2003). We also position our work within the discussions initiated by members of the European Commission or other European institutions. Both Jacques Delors and his successor, Jacques Santer have appealed to Europe's rich mix of religious communities and currents of thought. Santer has identified an important role for churches and other religiously affiliated institutions in overcoming the materialism that too often characterises our civilisation. He also has stressed the potential and importance of inter-religious dialogue to include representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches in Europe with representatives of Judaism, Islam and all the humanisms. What he expects from such a dialogue is not solutions to problems so much as the contribution of a new vision (cf. Spinder *et al.*, 2003).

ENRECA also recognizes and intends to contribute to other initiatives and developments. For example members of ENRECA are contributing to the implementation of the recommendations of the final document of the "International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination" (Madrid, 23 – 25 Nov 2001). This document proposes that school education should promote freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination based on religion and belief, respect for plurality of religions, opinions and belief, and cross-cultural understanding and respect. It should also combat discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief, as well as stereotypes and prejudices based on religion and belief and should emphasize the respect for human rights and freedom of religion or belief as preconditions for protecting equal human dignity and for peaceful co-existence in pluralistic societies. Moreover, it should secure the right not to receive religious education inconsistent with one's own (parents) conviction. ENRECA encourages the various projects initiated by the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief that have the aim to make the recommendations into concrete action in the classroom as well as in the national policy context ("Teaching for tolerance project", database of relevant curriculum models etc; see www.oslocoalition.org/html/project_school_education/Stories_Competition.htm).

ENRECA also supports the projects of the European Association for World Religions in Education (EAWRE) that aim to promote knowledge and understanding of different religions in the classrooms of Europe. These include the annual publication of a calendar of festival of religions represented in Europe.

Members of ENRECA are contributing to the work of the Council of Europe Project *Intercultural Education and the Challenge of Religious Diversity and Dialogue*.

Members of ENRECA are advisors to the Project. For example, a position paper written for the Project by Robert Jackson (November 2002), analyses the concept of plurality in relation to the dimension of religious diversity within intercultural education, arguing that 'Through exploring religious and cultural plurality, students will be enabled to form their own views on pluralism at both the social level and the level of individual identity' (p. 4). This view encapsulates ENRECA's position.

The Council of Europe Project has influenced *The Declaration of the European Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe*, Athens, Greece, 10-12 November 2003 titled "Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy". This declaration recognises religion as an integrative part of intercultural education, Section 11 of the declaration includes an appeal for new conceptual research on intercultural education with a view to adapting terminology and clearly defining the content and context of intercultural education. In the view of the declaration, intercultural education should: 'help to build understanding of the European dimension of education in the context of globalisation, by introducing respect for human rights and diversity, foundations for managing diversity, openness to other cultures, inter-religious dialogue and "Euro-Arab dialogue" (...)" (Declaration, 2003).

ENRECA hopes to contribute more widely to European policy making in religious, values and intercultural education, raising the profile of these fields in a climate that has tended to emphasise research in science and technology and contributing to the debate about common values in Europe

Agenda

ENRECA's ongoing co-operation will include research projects that take account of the following themes:

- Exploring further the issues of 'competence' and 'context' as two crucial dimensions of religious pedagogy.
- The value of a contextual understanding of identity grounded in a developing relationship with others-in-community, the natural world and transcendence.
- The relation between religion and culture in various contexts; the 'horizontal' dimension of religion as a cultural phenomenon and the 'vertical' dimension of religion, concerned with issues of transcendence and ultimate truth.
- The local in the light of the universal and the universal in the light of the local.

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