

READY - Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of, and approaches to,  
teacher education in the context of  
"Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020)



**READY**  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY

# Guidelines for Online Communication

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## Context and Purpose

The following guidelines are part of a three-year Erasmus+ project on "Religious Education and Diversity – Sharing experiences of, and approaches to, teacher education in the context of 'Education and Training 2020' (READY)". For further information see [www.readyproject.eu](http://www.readyproject.eu).

Teacher training institutions in Germany, England, Italy, Austria, Scotland and Sweden are exploring the topic "Religion and Diversity" in two respects: the mutual exchange of diverse forms of Religious Education and the variety of approaches to subject teaching and learning, in which the question of religious and philosophical heterogeneity will be considered and discussed.

The main target group of the project are teacher trainees for Religious Education (RE). The project began with a structured online communication between three pairs of teacher trainee groups from two European countries. Using the READY online platform on eTwinning the trainees informed each other and exchanged perspectives on:

- the programs of RE teacher education in their countries
- the structure, content and challenges concerning RE in their countries with a focus on the issue of "Religion and Diversity"
- their motivation to teach RE and the personal and professional challenges of the subject in their country

Against this background the three paired groups of RE teacher trainees prepared teaching sequences on "Religion and Diversity" to be piloted in secondary schools. These teaching modules will also allow pupils of RE classes to use eTwinning in order to exchange views with another RE class abroad.

These guidelines initially helped to structure and facilitate the online communication process within the READY project. The experiences gained in the project can, however, also be used by other institutions and persons interested in dialogue and exchange between European partners and may thus also contribute to the further development of the eTwinning program.

## eTwinning and the Alternatives

eTwinning is an initiative of the European Commission, launched in 2005 to encourage schools in the EU Member states to collaborate using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The main concept behind eTwinning is that schools are paired with other schools, developing a so-called “eTwinning project”. The two schools communicate, share and learn from each other using the internet, especially e-mail and video conferencing. eTwinning projects can last for any length of time ranging from only a week up to creating permanent relationships between schools.

The eTwinning platform provides the necessary infrastructure and support for free and has been used by over 300 000 teachers in almost 150 000 schools for more than 40 000 projects. For further information, examples, introductory power point presentations, advice on how to register and how to find partners please see – in more than 20 languages:

[www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net)



This eTwinning website gives a detailed introduction into the platform and provides examples of successful eTwinning partnerships. All partner institutions have to register. One partner writes a short application for the “project” which will normally be accepted by the respective national eTwinning agency. Then the second or third partner joins the project and the online communication can begin.

For some users and questions regarding details, it will be helpful to participate in an eTwinning workshop offered at regular intervals in all countries of the European Union.

One of the ideas of the READY project is to use eTwinning on two levels: First of all in teacher training institutions to develop teaching sequences by teacher trainees, and secondly, in schools where the teacher trainees and other teachers try out their lesson plans with the aim to motivate, if possible, classes also to make use of the eTwinning

tools. This double decker concept would have the advantage that teacher trainees gain first hand experience as eTwinning learners before introducing and moderating eTwinning processes in schools.

At first this plan proved to be difficult, since eTwinning has only been open for schools up to now and not for teacher training institutions. For the READY project the partner institutions were, however, kindly offered a special permit. Whenever this should not be possible for other academic institutions, alternative means of online communication can be used, e.g. Google drive.

## Steps to be Taken ...

- Online preparations between teacher educators (e.g. via e-mail, skype, facetime)
- Establishing the platform: eTwinning or alternatives
- Upload of basic information, documents to be studied by the trainees
- Trainees gather questions for partner group and mail them in advance
- Teacher trainees in both countries prepare online conference



- Online conference and documentation of results
- Development of teaching sequences
- Analysis and summary of the e-mail communication by the teacher educators
- Documentation on the project website
- Evaluation



## Step by Step

### 1. Online preparation between teacher educators (e.g. by mail, skype, facetime)

After finding a partner institution, the teacher educators who want to organize and moderate the eTwinning exchange should agree on the following:

**What?** The content and the main topics of the exchange project should be outlined. Two different aspects have to be kept in mind: on the one hand the exchange about teacher education in the partner countries, on the other hand the exchange between twins of teacher trainees planning teaching sequences together in the context of the project.

It would be helpful to decide rather early on the frame of the planned teaching projects (topic, key, level), in the case of READY within the overall context of “Religion and Diversity”. This would allow the teacher educators moderating the online communication to arrange suitable pairing and to facilitate the process.

**Who?** In connection with the content of the online communication, it should be decided who exactly will be communicating with whom. There could be three different groups of twins, which, however, will sometimes also overlap: teacher educators, teacher trainees and pupils. So there might be communication between teacher educators and teacher trainees and/or communication between teacher trainees and pupils or also communication involving teacher educators, teacher trainees and pupils as well.

**What for?** The objectives and goals of the online communication in different phases and on different levels of the process should be clear. In general the online conferences should imply elements of structured discussion on prepared topics, but also a more individualized exchange of teaching experiences and teaching cultures (cf. below, step 7). More detailed planning will be connected to the topics of the online conferences and

the topics of the scheduled teaching modules. In this context it should also be agreed upon how to document the results of the online communication.

**How?** As far as the software is concerned, eTwinning would be prioritized – cf. step 2. If the use of eTwinning is not possible, an alternative digital platform has to be prepared. Regarding the further technical requirements, there are basically two possibilities: With one centralized camera, one efficient microphone and one personal computer connected to a digital projector, or with several individual notebooks and tablets.

If the project plans a project website (as in the READY project: [www.readyproject.eu](http://www.readyproject.eu)), recordings and connections between the project website and local partner websites should be discussed.

**When?** The most difficult problem might be the planning of a timeline. Who is going to communicate when exactly with whom? There should be a thoroughly thought out schedule, but also with room for flexibility and alternatives. Different factors have to be kept in mind: schedules of the different teacher training programs; a possible exchange and overlap of different groups of teacher trainees; vacation periods; the schedules of teacher trainees and classes involved; the scheduling of the planned teaching modules in the program of the scholastic year; the schedule of the project demanding certain deliverables to be given on a date, etc.



The easier decision is how long online conferences should last: 45 – 90 minutes seem to be an appropriate frame of time.

## **2. Establishing the platform: eTwinning or alternatives**

A basic requirement for the success of the project is an easy to use and well-functioning internet platform for online communication. In the very beginning all partners of the project should agree on a common technical basis. This allows uncomplicated access to the discussions and products of other twin partners.



While choosing the platform, the following aspects are to be taken in account:

- ***Simplicity of handling:*** The different functions of the platform should be usable without time-consuming and complicated introductions. The instructions for the use of the platform have to be rather short, clearly structured and easy to read.
- ***Good support:*** If things don't work, this can cause precipitous demotivation and endanger the whole project. A reliable and easy to reach hotline would be very valuable.
- ***Right of access:*** There should be a clear and differentiating definition of the rights of access for teacher educators, teacher trainees, pupils and guests.
- ***Files:*** Manifold sorts of documents will enrich the online platform: texts, pictures, video recordings, interviews, music ... But please observe the copyrights given!
- ***Communication:*** For the individual exchange the project platform should offer an *email function*. For discussions open to everybody interested, the function of a *forum space* will be necessary. The possibility of a *chat function* for the exchange between twin partners is indispensable. This chat room can then also be used for online communication between twins of teacher educators, teacher trainees or pupils.

Preferably not only email and chat communication will take place, but also *video conferences*. This could meet the idea of a virtual class room, in which two classes in two different countries participate in a collaborative learning process. It would be ideal, if the online platform could also offer the necessary requirements for this. Alternatively other facilities as skype or facetime might be used for video conferences.

- **Documentation:** To meet the goals and aims of the project it is indispensable to think right from the start about the documentation of the communications, especially of the chat and video conferences.

All these technical requirements are provided by eTwinning. The use of this platform is therefore highly recommended. For the communication between schools and classes, the registration for eTwinning is easy and hassle free anyway.

### **3. Upload of basic information, documents to be studied by the trainees**

To prepare the online communication between groups of teacher trainees it will be helpful to upload some basic information geared for intensifying the interest of the participating persons. This can e.g. be texts and information about the situation of teacher education (and in the case of READY: of religious education) in the countries involved:

What is the relationship between academic university studies and the teacher training program? What is the curriculum of the induction program? What are the principal contents and competences to be covered? In the case of READY: What is the status of religious education in your country? What are the main challenges for the subject in the years to come? How are you dealing with the situation of increasing diversity?

Uploading and reading basic information also provides the opportunity to get used to the online platform. It would help, if the trainees would try out the possibilities in this early phase of online communication: Uploading, downloading, chatting, video function, possibilities of saving data, recording and documentation of communication.

Don't forget that pictures or even video recordings of your institution and your group might be more motivating than long texts! Pictures of the persons participating, together with their email addresses, will also open the door for individual and informal communication between the trainees of the partner institutions. This more private and unstructured communication medium can give additional motivation and accompany the entire project and continue even beyond.

#### **4. Trainees gather questions for partner group and mail them in advance**

The online communication will certainly be enhanced and more structured if the trainees take time to think of possible questions to their partner group in advance. These questions will be different according to the content of the project. There will, however, always be an interest in the following:

- Questions about the educational system, academic studies and the specific part of the program which prepares trainees to teach. Questions about the organizational frame (length, assessments, internships and placements) will be just as interesting as questions about the content of the study programs and the competencies to be enhanced.
- There will also be a keen interest in the teaching experiences of the partner group. Positive and inspiring experiences might be just as interesting as an exchange about difficulties and obstacles the colleagues are struggling with. The class room setting and atmosphere, questions of class room management, the text books and materials provided, the burden of preparation and marking – all this can be part of a vivid picture of the situation in the partner country.
- A third area of questions will address the professional role of the teacher trainees in a more personal way. This specific and biographic approach will add deeper insight. The questions can aim at the understanding of one's role, the motivation, perspectives for career development, the personal perception of the subject taught, perspectives and visions for the future development of the subject etc.

#### **5. Teacher trainees in both countries prepare online conference**

The online conference itself demands careful preparations regarding the topics, organization and technology.

As far as the **content** is concerned, the twin groups should first ask each other questions and try to answer them. It will be good to prepare and structure this dialogue via email correspondence in advance. There will possibly even not be enough time to treat all

questions coming up. In this case the exchange of questions and answers can continue in written form on the platform.

As far as the **organization** is concerned, it will be important to distribute some roles: Moderators could be one of the teacher educators or one could think of a division of the moderating roles between the teacher educators of the twin institutions. Furthermore it makes sense to decide beforehand the temporal order in which the trainees will ask questions. In the further course of the process, the discussion should, however, be opened for other trainees bringing in their comments, demands and additional remarks. The moderating person might catalyze further discussion. In any case she or he has to structure the conversation and pay attention that as many areas of interest as possible are covered. In large groups it might make sense to have a list of speakers.

Towards the end of the online conference there must be enough time to agree on the further procedure. It could e.g. be a good idea to form small groups or pairs collaborating on planning a teaching sequence or to have at least an exchange of teaching ideas and experiences related to the theme of the overall project.

The time frame shouldn't exceed 90 minutes – last but not least for reasons of concentration and in order to limit the contents which are supposed to be followed up.

As far as the **technical side** is concerned, it is strongly recommended to test the facilities and the equipment about a week beforehand. Since it is very difficult to gather groups for a certain date, it would be unfortunate to lose time to fixing technical problems.

## **6. Online conference and documentation**

If the online conference takes place as planned, it is essential to make arrangements for further communication at the end of it and, if at all possible, to be ready to decide on the appointments to follow.

First of all it should be decided by when the teacher trainees should form groups or pairs in order to prepare teaching modules. Also it should be clear until when the teacher trainees can diarise the topics and schedules of their lessons. On this basis in some cases it can already be planned to have an Etwinning exchange between classes.

The conference, or at least the minutes of the conference, could be documented on the online platform. Important aspects and insights will also be processed as soon as possible for the website of the framework project, in the case of READY for [www.readyproject.eu](http://www.readyproject.eu).

## **7. Development of teaching sequences**

During this phase of the project, communication will take place completely in the hands of the pairs or groups of teacher trainees. They will either just exchange and mutually comment ideas, lesson plans and teaching experiences or plan a shared teaching sequence together, in the case of READY on “Religion and Diversity”.

The topics of this online communication will be as manifold as planning and performing lessons are in everyday school life. There could be discussion on questions of content, on didactical and methodological approaches. The trainees could exchange lesson plans and try out, how the same lesson plan works in different contexts. They could make video recordings of their lessons and ask the twin partner to comment and to advise.

As far as video recordings are concerned, it is very important to adhere to the local laws and rules for data protection. Often you will have to ask for the permission from the pupils, teachers and parents. If you have any doubts, contact the administrators of your school or institution.

The online communication of this phase will deal with very concrete problems of planning and teaching. It would, however, also be good to consider a meta-analysis: Where are the commonalities and differences of the two teaching cultures? What can we learn from each other? An exchange on this type of question will make important contributions to the overall outcome of the project.

## **8. Analysis and summary of the e-mail communication by the teacher educators**

The main insights of the process described in step 7 should be related to the general frame of religious education and teacher education. For the READY project the cross connection to the case studies developed as a further “intellectual output”, but also possible criteria for the preparation of the study visits in project year 2 will be important.

The evaluation and structuring of the email correspondence could – in consultation with the teacher trainees – be done by the teacher educators. If the teacher trainees don't feel scrutinized, all email correspondence could be cc'd to the teacher educators. In the case of eTwinning this would take place automatically.

### **9. Documentation on the project website**

Keep in mind to send significant results, summaries, statements, etc. to the colleagues responsible for the READY website. Lesson plans should be forwarded as soon as possible to the persons responsible for the overall documentation of the project for further processing.

### **10. Evaluation**

These guidelines show that online communication between partners in different countries, in different educational systems and often in a foreign language is a complex undertaking. Therefore it would be important to reflect on the communication processes, to utter problems not yet dealt with in this document and to make proposals for improvements.

## Examples and Impulses



Aberdeen School of Education  
[www.abdn.ac.uk/education](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/education)

Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und  
Lehrerbildung (Gymnasien) Tübingen  
[www.seminar-tuebingen.de](http://www.seminar-tuebingen.de)







## Aberdeen Tübingen

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Undergraduate, graduate and post graduate programs for teachers in primary and secondary schools</li> <li>➤ Courses for teachers on Religious and Moral Education, Philosophy for Children and critical thinking skills</li> <li>➤ Courses on the effective delivery of non-denominational Religious and Moral Education in schools</li> <li>➤ Current research into withdrawal from Religious Education (RE); the emergence of philosophy in RE, and the use of “mindfulness” in the classroom</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 18 month program for trainees in grammar schools in cooperation with about 50 schools</li> <li>➤ Didactical centre: Cooperation with the University of Tübingen / In-service learning courses / development of didactical theories and teaching materials</li> <li>➤ Cooperation with manifold stakeholders in the field of education</li> <li>➤ Denominational RE with option of cooperation between protestant and catholic RE</li> <li>➤ Pilot projects for Islamic RE</li> <li>➤ Cooperation with Ethics/Philosophy in a school subject group (“identity and dialogue“)</li> <li>➤ Basic studies in ethics and philosophy for grammar school teachers of all subjects</li> <li>➤ National debate on alternatives: religious and ethical education for all in one learning group?</li> </ul> |
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*My name is Angela, I'm 27 years old and currently living in Tübingen.*



*Beside RE, my subjects are English and Psychology. Most of my studies I completed in Tübingen. In 2010 I did a year abroad in Edinburgh, where I studied Divinities at the University of Edinburgh – and since then I have been in love with Scotland ;)*

*During my studies in Edinburgh, I realised a lot of differences between the Scottish and the German university systems with regard to the studies of Divinity / Theology. I'll list some of those differences – of which some are plain facts and some my own opinion and therefore debatable – for further discussion:*

- *The denominational separation at German universities with almost no cooperation between Catholics and Protestants.*
- *I have the feeling that Tübingen (and maybe Theology in Germany as a whole) is very content oriented, whereas Edinburgh (and maybe all of Scotland) is very experience oriented. For instance, students of Theology in Tübingen are required to study Ancient Greek and Latin, whereas both languages are almost neglected in Edinburgh. Edinburgh on the other hand focuses on current topics and issues, such as "World Christianity" and "Religion and Ethics", which are both two main subjects in their curriculum.*
- *Teacher training in general is a lot different in Scotland / the UK than in Germany which might also be partly due to the different school systems. To become a teacher for secondary level in Germany, you have to study at least two subjects at university – those that you'll teach later. The average length of study is 5 years – for Theology / Divinity it's even 6 years for those who have to complete any languages (Ancient Greek or/and Latin). Those studies don't include a lot of pedagogy. This only follows during the "Referendariat" (the teacher training programme) which takes another 1 ½ years.*

*I'm very much looking forward to getting to know you all. If you've got any questions / comments, just let me know.*

*Best, Angela*

*My name is Anne.*

*I live with my family in Sutherland in the north of Scotland and travel to Aberdeen a couple of days a week during term time to attend lectures and workshops for my course. I've come into teaching rather late in life, having worked as a freelance copywriter for 17 years before applying for the teacher training course at Aberdeen. I completed my MA Religious Studies at Edinburgh University in 1992. I was interested to read Angela's biography and hear that she'd been to Edinburgh. I remember quite a few students who went on exchanges to Tübingen from New College!*

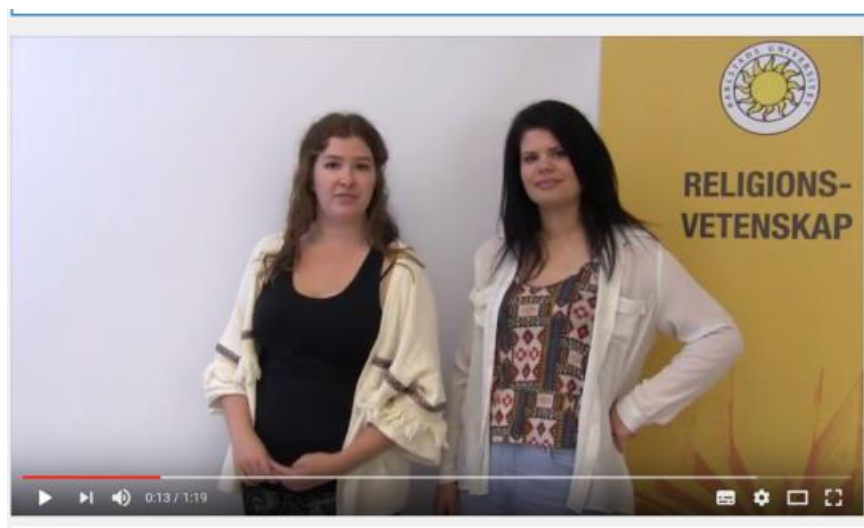
*The teacher training course has been challenging but very rewarding for me. This photo was taken last time I was in Germany. I don't know why I'm smiling, because we'd just had a breakdown on the autobahn.*



Even more motivating and inspiring might be presenting oneself via video message



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYeg4SZNpkk&index=4&list=PLtkwwpj\\_5QUyMagLNBc5AVPmo4ZyvDOh](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYeg4SZNpkk&index=4&list=PLtkwwpj_5QUyMagLNBc5AVPmo4ZyvDOh)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGSzY9tmV6s&feature=youtu.be>

## Tübingen Asks Aberdeen



- How many hours per week is RE taught?
- What does everyday school practice look like?
- Which fields of study are possible prerequisites? / What do you need to have studied (to become an RE teacher)?
- Is there something similar to the German “Bildungsplan” (“education plan” – issued by the state / “Bundesland” government, which determines two-year teaching goals for every school subject)? If yes, is it available online?
- Is it possible (for a pupil) to withdraw from RE?
- What motivated you to become an RE teacher?
- How many hours/lessons per week do you have to teach? (Now – and later)
- Is RE well respected in a school context and by the general public?
- What problems/challenges do you face?
- How strong is the influence of churches or institutions affiliated with churches on the content of RE in general and, specifically, the RMPS curriculum? If there is an influence: Who exerts it and how? (Reformed Church, Catholic Church...)
- If there is no such influence or if it is marginal: Who else determines the “education plan” (“Bildungsplan”), i.e. guidelines for the teaching content? Who makes the rules?
- Are the curricula for RE studies/RE teacher education different in different regions or even universities? Or are they identical (or at least similar) in all of Scotland?
- To what degree is Christianity a topic of RE? Generally, how much of a topic are the world religions as compared to moral education?
- What are the differences between Scottish and English RE?
- Is RE also taught by pastors and priests?

## Aberdeen Asks Tübingen



- What is the implication of denominational RE for non-religious pupils and for their rights to religious freedom?
- What is the typical religious composition of classes within German state schools, and how are various non-Christian religions accommodated?
- How do you approach Judaism and the Holocaust?
- What is your approach to teaching ethics or philosophy?
- Is there a difference in religiosity between West and East Germany? Does this have an impact on teaching/curriculum?
- What is the exemption principle/law concerning “opting out” of the subject?
- How is RMPS viewed in Germany? Particularly, how do the pupils react to Christianity?
- What role does interdisciplinary learning have in German schools?
- What are the hurdles you have come across within your teaching practice so far? Where do these problems stem from? Are you able to combat them?
- Intercity schools in Scotland and UK typically have more issues (e.g. behavioural, poverty, drugs, alcohol etc.) Is this the same in Germany?
- Teachers trained in Scotland might face problems if they wanted to teach in the rest of the UK due to differences in qualifications. Would this be the same in other German-speaking countries e.g. Austria?
- Are you encouraged to use teaching theories e.g. constructivism, socio-cultural theory etc.?

## Swedish teacher students answer questions of teacher trainees from Vienna and London



### What inspired you to teach Religious Education?

For Tilda, it was a 6 months stay in India 2012 that made her take the step to study religion. She got so much inspiration of how religion can be a part of both the social and spiritual life of people that she thought she wished to share the content of what her eyes had seen. Also, to enlighten religion as one of many aspects of being human she thinks we may be one step closer to understand each other and respect our differences.

Team 1, Gabriella and Lisa, are interested in pluralism, diversity and ethical issues and got inspired to teach religion thank to that interest.

Maria was inspired by her high school religious education teacher. Thanks to him she got more open minded about religion and his education style really peaked her interest. She wants to do the same for her future students and open a door for more understanding when it comes to religion.

Amanda has always loved mythology and old folklore. She has also always known she wanted to be a teacher so combining her two interests in religious education felt like a natural step.

### What do you think is the aim of Religious Education?

We think that one purpose of the religious education is the acceptance of others. Due to the common policy of values of the Swedish school, the official school has to make practice of all human equality. The aim of religious education is also to become a more educated person when it comes to other people's expressions, to learn more about

others and get a more profound understanding of the people in the world. The curriculum of RE determines that the aim is to develop:

- 1) The ability to analyse religions and outlooks on life based on different interpretations and perspectives.
- 2) Knowledge of human identity in relation to religions and outlooks on life.
- 3) Knowledge of different views on the relationships between religion and science, and the ability to analyse these.
- 4) The ability to use ethical concepts, theories and models.
- 5) The ability to examine and analyse ethical issues in relation to Christianity, other religions and outlooks on life.

### **What topics are covered in Religious Education?**

From the curriculum of RE:

- Christianity, the other world religions and different outlooks on life, their characteristics and how they are expressed by individuals and groups in the present, in Sweden and the world.
- Different views of human beings and God within and between religions. Religion in relation to gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity and sexuality.
- The identities of groups and individuals and how they can be shaped in relation to religion and outlooks on life such as written sources, traditions and historical and contemporary events.
- Different views of the relationship between religion and science in current public debates.
- Interpretation and analysis of different theories and models in normative ethics, and how these can be applied. Ethical and moral views of what a good life and a good society can be.
- Analysis of arguments on ethical issues based on Christianity, other world religions, outlooks on life, and students' own standpoints.



In summary the topics are: the world religions and basic knowledge about them, such as what they believe, how the religion came to be and how it affects them and society both today and throughout history. Ethics and morality. How different religious view each other and the relationship between religion and science. How the sexes are viewed in the different religions and between them.

### **What is the subject called?**

Religionskunskap = "Religion"

Religionskunskap is directly translated to religious knowledge.

### **How do you feel about the justification for only teaching Christianity?**

From a non-confessional point of view we feel that by doing this the students miss out a deeper knowledge of the world and other people. By teaching the pupils about other religions we give the pupils a fundament of knowledge, which can lead to better acceptance of others. It is important to get presented others options and their point of view.

### **How do you promote social cohesion?**

As a teacher, you have a responsibility to maintain the cohesion in the classroom, every student has the right to have their own opinion as long as they respect each other in the classroom.

### **Do you have faith schools?**

Yes we have a few, but not public ones.

**What religions are taught?**

The world religions: christianity, islam, judaism, hinduism and buddhism.

The curriculum says that we have to teach: "Christianity, the other world religions and different outlooks on life, their characteristics and how they are expressed by individuals and groups in the present, in Sweden and the world."

The most important religion we have to teach is Christianity. According to the curriculum we also have to teach about the world religions which are: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Depending on the teacher other smaller religions are also taught. It depends on the teacher's choice and interest and mostly limited to time.

**Is RE confessional?**

No, in Sweden's public schools RE is not confessional.

**Do they learn about religion or do they learn to be religious?**

The pupils learn about religion and different religions to widen the thinking on many beliefs and see many perspectives of what religion may mean to people around the world.

**Is RE compulsory?**

In all the pre-university classes (Swedish: gymnasium, age 15-18), RE is a part of the study programme and therefore compulsory. For some programmes even more courses of religious education are compulsory. RE can also be chosen as one of some optional courses.

**Is RE taught by specialists? If so what qualifies someone as a specialist?**

In our teacher education we study at university at the faculty of religion and philosophy, where the leader of our courses has an academic diploma within religious science - PhD for example.

For our future pupils, their teacher is educated at the university and has a degree in teachers education of religion and pedagogics.

**Can you opt of RE?**

RE is compulsory.

**Do they have collective worship?**

No, the official school in Sweden is non confessional.

**Is RE examined?**

Yes, at the end of the course the students get a grade.

**How is RE beneficial to students?**

The students learn to understand each other and people with other cultural expressions. This is important in Sweden, which is a multicultural society. They also learn how our ethics and morals, and society over all, is shaped by a Christian foundation and history. It also helps students to relate to people with different sexuality, social-economic background and ethnicity.

**Is Religious Education a class you have to take?**

Yes, from approximately the age of 7-19 the pupils study religious education.

**How many students are there per class?**

That depends on a few different things. Usually the highest number of students in a class is about 25-30 students. There can be classes with only 12, but mostly it is about 19 students per class.

**How many different religions/religious denominations are there in class?**

The official school in Sweden is non confessional, and since we live in a country with religious freedom and diversity it is possible with a great amount of different religions, but we would say that every class has a representation of Atheism, Christianity and Islam. It also depends a lot on the schools location and the city that the school is located in.

**Are you conducting any studies on the statistics what type of religions/ religious denominations are present in your class?**

No, at the moment we are not.

**Is there just one teacher for every religion/religious denomination? Or is there one teacher per religion/religious denomination?**

One teacher teaches all of the religions.

**In class, are there any differences between active church-members and people, who aren't following any traditions?**

Sweden doesn't conduct any statistics on what religion the residents follow and the school doesn't make any difference, all the students follow the same curriculum. Religiously raised students often have more knowledge in their particular religion than the others.

**How do you treat the differences between various religions/religious denominations?**

We teach the students about the different denominations in the world religions we specified earlier. These denominations are most often the biggest ones with the most followers. For example when teaching about Christianity we teach the students about Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox.

**Does it happen that students fight (or argue) about religion?**

In this subject, we have different opinions. Team 1 and Team 3 answered that we don't have any experience with this issue.

The experience of Team 2 is that it happens.

**Do parents complain about the class "Religious Education"?****What are the most common reasons?**

In this subject, we have different opinions. Team 1 and Team 3 answered that we don't have any experience with parents complaining about the class "Religious Education", but there is a current debate about religiosity in school. As to whether yoga practice and summer break ceremonies in church should be allowed. Our lack of experience can be explained by the general lack of experience of teaching.

Team 2: Yes they do. Since we are not teachers yet, we don't have a lot of firsthand experience on this question. We have heard from our different supervisors about what happens. Parents that complain about the content of the subject are often religious. They usually think that as teachers we force other religious beliefs onto their children or we don't teach about their religion the right way, or their religion doesn't get enough focus. Parents that are non-religious mostly complain that their children's grade isn't high enough, but religious parents sometimes complain about the grades and vice versa.

**Do you pray in class? If so, how?**

No, the official school in Sweden is non confessional.

**Are you only talking about the specific highlights of each religion or do you also/only discuss the common issues in each of them?**

The curriculum determines that we have to teach both highlights and discuss the religions. As previously stated Christianity has to be taught in dept. A lot of how much each religion is taught depends on the teacher. We have to show highlights in all the religions but the teacher has a lot of freedom to decide where the main focus should be. Time is also an important element in how much of each religion is taught, sometimes you don't have enough time to do everything you want. There is an advanced religious science course that only some students take to learn religion on a deeper level.

**Are you teaching ethical issues like protection of life, good behaviour (for living together), etc.?**

The official Swedish school is based on a common policy of values that teaches good behaviour, equality etc. Ethics and morality is an important part of religious education. Note that these values rest on a Christian foundation.

**Do the students get grades? If yes, how?**

Yes. The grades are A-F, where A-E are "approved", A the highest grade and F is "failed". During the semester the students get to show qualities equivalent to the grades. There are different criterias that the students has to accomplish to get the different grades. These criterias are decided by a group of scholars. By the end of the class these qualities are added together to a final grade.

**At your university, how often do you have “practice”/”internship”?**

Three times.

It depends on what grade you are specializing in. For us teaching high school students (age:16-19) there are three different times for practice, for which we are graded. The first two are five weeks each and the third is 10 weeks.

**At your university, how many classes do you have to take per trimester?**

In one trimester we take 30 points divided into different classes depending on theme. One trimester takes place over 20 weeks. One per trimester.

**Do you already teach in a school?**

No, we are students but we teach during our internship and when we have time. We can be substitute teachers if we want to, but we are not allowed to plan classes or administer grades until we finish our education.

**How long does it take to prepare for a class you teach? And how do you prepare?**

It depends in the class the subject and how much experience you already have. As teachers we have planning time scheduled. We also need to prepare the lessons by reading the curriculum to make sure we follow it precisely for the sake of our students' education.

Edited by Lisa Lannerås

# Experiences





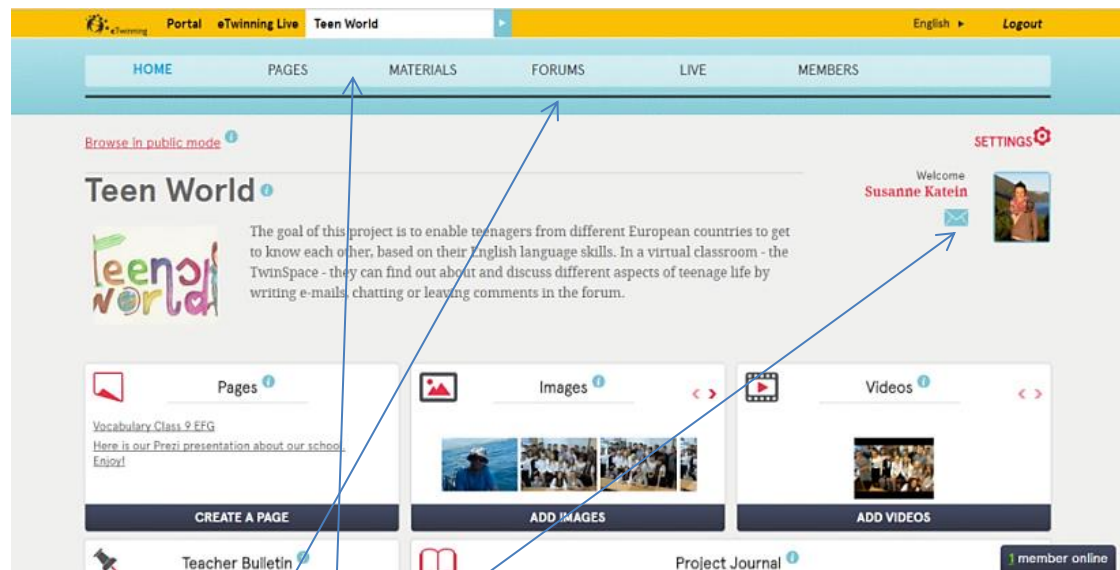
Susanne Katein, teacher trainee for English & Mathematics at the "Seminar" Tübingen / Germany

***Teen World – European teenagers meet on eTwinning. A (virtual) intercultural exchange between secondary school pupils in Germany and Poland***

***My experience with the eTwinning platform:*** It was a great experience to run this project which required good cooperation with my Polish TwinTeacher. Our students were also motivated and liked to participate in the online-project.

*The goal of this project was to enable teenagers from different European countries to get to know each other, based on their English language skills. In a virtual classroom – the TwinSpace – they could find out about and discuss different aspects of teenage life by writing e-mails, writing posts or leaving comments in the forum. The students talked about each other's interests and lives. They learnt about similarities and differences as well as they shared their opinion and thoughts on topics such as mobile behaviour and teenage language. The exchange was based on the students' English knowledge, which was expanded at the same time. Additionally, they improved their IT skills by using different IT tools.*

## TwinSpace Tools



- **Project Journal:** It allows the administrators to share information, links and documents. It makes communication to TwinSpace members easy, by giving them up-dates or posting results.
- **TwinMails:** TwinSpace members can write e-mails to each other.
- **Forums:** Every TwinSpace member can participate in a forum discussion by writing comments.
- **Profiles:** Every TwinSpace member can create his/her own profile and write posts for other members.
- **Chatroom:** TwinSpace members can talk to each other synchronically.
- **Pages, Materials etc.:** Presentations, pictures, audio or video files can be uploaded as well as other websites can be linked to the platform.
- **eTwinningLive:** It's possible to also have a video conference in which all TwinSpace members can meet and talk to each other live. This event has to be registered in advance with a short description, date, time etc.



Christof Schilling, teacher educator for ethics & philosophy, Tübingen / Germany

### ***My experiences with eTwinning***

*Used to other digital platforms, eTwinning appears at first sight somehow demure. It seemed to be a system with a logic of its own, but not intuitive. Once one invests some time to understand the architecture of the platform, e.g. the difference between “eTwinning live” and “twinspace”, and to find out how the registration of a project and new project members works, eTwinning offers a large variety of opportunities.*

*eTwinning facilitates all types of communication necessary for an international project: short information, mail, chats, video conferences, the storing of text files, pictures, video clips and recordings and links to youtube. The only disadvantage seemed to me that the recording of video conferences has been connected to some complications up to now, including the necessity to make a request long time in advance.*

*What is very useful are the help functions of eTwinning, last but not least the very friendly, straightforward and pragmatic support by the coordinating person in the German national eTwinning agency.*

*When eTwinning is used as a primary platform for online communication, it is very easy for the user to keep track of the processes. On the other hand, however, eTwinning tends to fall behind when the partners and members of an international project communicate in parallel by other means of online communication (email, skype, facebook etc.). But this, in my opinion, leads to the decisive advantage of eTwinning: It guarantees data protection, not only for the communication within the project, but also for the data involved!*



Kristian Niemi, teacher educator for Religious Education, Karlstad / Sweden

### ***Experiences with eTwinning: Karlstad***

*In the initial phase, a workshop was conducted with personal trained in eTwinning. This helped both staff and students to get started with eTwinning.*

*From the start, it was evident that eTwinning / twinspace sought to create a safe space for pupils. This is one of the unique traits of eTwinning, that sets it apart from other social media / working spaces, such as (for instance) Facebook, Skype, Google drive and the like. Each and every person, applying for an eTwinning account is vetted and manually approved (or not). This is crucial, if the tool would be used in a school environment.*

#### ***Tools used***

*Twinspace offers a set of different tools, which can be used for online communication. (As long as these internal tools are used, the online communication is within the safe space, mentioned above.) These include creating web-pages with free content; uploading files; linking in video files from Youtube or Vimeo; video-conferencing; a project journal.*

*Video-conferencing is done using Adobe Connect as a back-end. It's a fairly versatile tool, but one our group did not utilize. (We, at KAU, are however familiar with it since we use Adobe Connect internally at the university, too.) This would, perhaps, be a tool that school children would not be able to handle on their own, but rather something which would remain in the teacher's hands.*

*Linking in video files from Youtube or Vimeo is kind of a weak spot. All other tools mentioned are “internal” of Twinspaces, and thus closed for the public (unless one chooses otherwise; see web-pages, below), but Youtube/Vimeo needs the linked clip to be publicly available. Thus one needs to be cautious, if one were to use this feature in a school environment.*

*Uploading of files is easy enough, and the ability to tag files freely facilitates good organisation.*

*Forums for online, a-synchronous communication. Has not been used by our group.*

*Creation of web-pages is fairly limited, but gets the job done. Setting up simple pages is a small task, quickly done, and a feature we have used quite extensively. It is also possible to link in uploaded files into these web-pages. This tool could well be used by anyone well enough versed in computers to write a word document. Individual pages can be made available on the public internet.*

*The project journal is what’s shown on the front page, and enables quick updates on what’s being done by the different groups involved. Our group has used the feature quite a bit, and it gives the (group-) site as a whole a personal touch.*

### **Summary**

*Centralizing online communication at Twinspaces has helped keep the three member group’s communication going. With a little effort and planning, the web-pages can be sorted hierarchically, and be both a place for internal work (limited access) and for publication (public access). A centralized use enables, say, a teacher to get an overview of what has been done.*

*Day to day communication is, however, more easily done through email or some such. The downside of this is that the communication isn’t saved nor available to the teacher (unless one takes extra steps). Another downside is that one then steps outside the “safe space” of eTwinning. An alternative, which keeps communication within eTwinning, would be to use the internal “forum function”. This would have none of the downsides mentioned above. However, none of the students involved in “READY Group 2” seem to have entertained the idea long enough to actually use it. With encouragement from the*

*teacher, the result would probably be different. This would be the advised procedure for, for instance, school classes.*

*All in all, the platform has served its purpose well, as far as Karlstad is concerned.*



Jankia Olschewski, researcher, Comenius-Institut, Münster / Germany

### ***Erfahrungen mit eTwinning***

*Working with eTwinning has been an enriching experience. It offers many possibilities to organize and exchange ideas and materials. It is also easy to access and uploading documents and photos has been no problem at all. Of course, it is hard for a platform to compete against so many other forms of communication. In day-to-day business, many times you are so consumed with email, facebook etc. that you just forget to log on to etwinning. This hinders an ongoing discussion and it means that it becomes rather a platform to upload elaborate material occasionally.*



## READY – The Project at a Glance

In contemporary European societies children grow up and form their identities in a world of diversity and plurality. Together with the increasing number of multi-faith classrooms, this emphasises the need to equip prospective teachers and teacher educators, and thereby also pupils, with adequate interreligious and intercultural skills and competences that allow them to navigate such complex and diverse contexts and cope with the resulting implications for the individual life-styles. Subjects like Religious Education (RE) or Ethics play an important role in facilitating the discussion of these issues and offering answers and explanations.

RE in public schools in Europe is designed in many ways. Each country's respective situation and form of organization differs significantly for mainly historical reasons. Despite the different contexts, an increasingly widespread discussion about the possible future of RE takes place. These discussions, however, are rarely linked together and have not yet reached the level of teacher education and training. Future religion teachers are normally only rather superficially familiar with the situation of RE (and related subjects) in other European countries and thus insufficiently prepared for a joint European perspective.

In addition, RE is faced with growing religious and ideological diversity of pupils and stakeholders alike across the entire European area. Current changes to the curricula and school structure, as well as wider debates on religion in the public sphere, have produced noticeable controversy about the place of RE in schools, how it should be delivered and what young people should be taught.

In the three-year Erasmus+ project "Religious Education and Diversity – Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of 'Education and

Training 2020' (READY)", teacher training institutions in Germany, England, Austria, Scotland and Sweden therefore explore the topic 'Religion and Diversity' in two respects: the mutual exchange of diverse forms of Religious Education and the variety of approaches to subject teaching and learning, in which the question of religious heterogeneity is considered and discussed. The results are examined and proposals for teaching Religion and Diversity in Europe will be published.

The main target group of the project are teacher trainees for Religious Education. The project began with a structured online communication between trainee teachers from different European countries. This process led to the development of educational modules on 'Religion and Diversity' exchanged between the teacher education institutions. At the same time, profile descriptions of the situation of religion teacher education in the participating countries were exchanged, an interactive READY website was set up, which begins to unfold the diversity of RE across Europe, and a guideline for one week study visits was developed.

In the second year of the project, groups of teacher educators and trainee teachers observed RE lessons in a European partner country for a week and held discussions with trainee teachers, pupils and stakeholders responsible for RE. These experiences were analysed on the basis of a practical guide to European RE, processed and documented. In parallel to these exchanges, local model RE lessons on "Religion and Diversity" were systematically evaluated and their delivery in the classroom also partly videotaped. The pupils will be encouraged to establish eTwinning contacts with a RE class in a partner country and in this way deepen their knowledge and experience of religious diversity across Europe.

From the very beginning, the entire project has been designed to achieve broad dissemination and a long-term impact, which is facilitated by the experience, expertise, contacts and structures of the Comenius Institute Münster. This includes, inter alia, a READY Newsletter, an interactive READY website, two national study days in Tübingen and London, a two-day final conference in Vienna and a documentation of key project results in book form.

READY focuses mainly on issues of didactics and pedagogy. The results of the project can, however, also be used by stakeholders and decision makers of state, churches and other religious communities.



The READY project consortium consists of six institutions, five of them preparing student teachers to teach Religious Education (RE) in state funded schools. All these partners have close and permanent working contacts with RE teachers and leaders of secondary schools and established local networks which will continuously accompany the project:

- Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung (Gymnasium) Tübingen / Germany (coordinating organisation)
- University College London, School of Education / England
- Karlstad University / Sweden
- University of Aberdeen, School of Education / Scotland
- Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule, Wien-Krems / Austria
- Comenius Institut Münster / Germany

The sixth partner, the Comenius Institut Münster, an internationally renowned Protestant Centre for Research and Development in education, is responsible for quality management, academic monitoring and dissemination processes.