

NEWSLETTER

Issue 4 > May 2017

Welcome

The latest issue of our newsletter is full of new reports, material and much more. You will hear about a study visit, communication guidelines we have developed, the first national multiplier event and a lesson example on religion and diversity in Scotland. Please enjoy the new developments in the READY project and visit our website for more information and resources:

www.readyproject.eu.

Report from Vienna on visiting London

From 20th March to 24th March, four student teachers and two course leaders from the KPH Vienna visited London to explore the English education system and how Religious Education/Religious Studies (RE/RS) is taught in England.



Austrian study group in London

We were warmly welcomed at the UCL Institute of Education by our hosts, who presented an overview of the history of education in England and the current situation of the training of RE teachers. The school systems differ in many respects and the training of teachers is also quite different to the Austrian system. During our stay we visited several schools where we observed English RE in practice.

Particularly noticeable is the focus on exams due to the fact that RE has the same standing as other subjects. This results in a high pace of teaching and reduced time for discussions. Unlike in Austria, the focus is strongly on ethical and philosophical issues. Such visits always provide a highly-appreciated opportunity to reflect on our own education system and our own lessons. A big thank you in particular to Alexis, who gave us a new perspective on using sacred and secular art in RE.

Following an introduction to collections at the British Museum, students used a Locally Agreed Syllabus to investigate RE skills that are used as learning objectives to plan lessons and schemes of learning.

Diversity was considered through various 'lenses' that inform the displays at the museum: historical, geographical, religious, cultural, thematic. We noted that diversity is presented both within and across faith traditions and cultures.

Inspired by displays in the Living and Dying Gallery, students devised learning experiences to generate meaningful discussion and creative collaborations that investigate how death and health impact belief.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room_24_living_and_dying.aspx

A huge thank you must be given to Martin, Uschi, Jo, Jane and Alexis who organised the visit, to the English students for the great discussions and to the teachers who allowed us into their classroom. It was a great pleasure to meet all of them.

by Roswitha Slavik (RE student, KPH Vienna)

Guidelines

The READY project is committed not only to exploring and developing new ways to teach Religion and Diversity, but also how to work and communicate as an inter-European team. As a result, two documents with recommendations were developed to help future ERASMUS+ teams with their projects. The first provides guidelines for online communication (via eTwinning and other social media platforms) and the second includes suggestions for planning real-live meetings with the participants via study visits. You will find information about these guidelines below. Visit our website for more!

Online communication guidelines

“Guidelines for Online Communication“ can soon be found in the subsection “Intellectual Outputs” of the resources on our website. The guidelines have been developed

- to facilitate, monitor and reflect communication between the teacher training institutions involved in READY and
- to prepare for the learning events and study visits that form part of the project.

In the context of READY, we used the eTwinning platform (www.eTwinning.net) for online communication. The guidelines describe and reflect the advantages and limits of this platform, discuss alternatives, and provide important and detailed advice for the practical proceedings for other Erasmus+ projects.



While eTwinning has been very successful in the field of schools for more than ten years, its use in the field of teacher education is relatively new. Therefore, colleagues from different European countries have met in Brussels on May 23rd and 24th, enhancing the use of eTwinning in the context of teacher training institutions. Members of the READY project were present at the conference and Susanne Katein, a student teacher of the Tübingen Seminar, has presented a research paper that describes and discusses an eTwinning communication of her 9th grade *English class with a partner class in Poland: Teen World. European teenagers meet on eTwinning. A (virtual) intercultural encounter.*

Study visit guidelines

The guidelines for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the study visits have been finalised and will be available on our website soon. They explain the aims and underlying scientific concepts of the visits, with focus on the observation and assessment of possible cultural and interreligious overlapping situations in the communities, schools and RE lessons.

In detail, study visits are structured as follows:



Resulting key research questions of the project deal with

- the promotion and facilitation of interreligious learning and dialogue
- the role of the Religious Education teachers, their religiosity, and the way and extent to which they introduce their own belief positions and truth claims
- whether a religious and ideological neutrality of religious education is possible and desirable

Fieldwork aims at collecting information through analyses of documents, collective discussions, direct observation, informal interviews, video recording and job shadowing.

The guidelines provide a variety of questions and tasks from which each group must select those which are best suited for the respective context both in the home and host country. Normally, deciding on only a few will serve the project purpose best.

Student teachers and teacher educators are invited to share their stories, insights and conclusions with others, as well as publishing short reports in the final READY documents.

The glossary of key terms at the end of the guidelines shall help to take a closer look at the semantic and factual environment of ‘diversity’. The list of underlying subject literature is intended to describe the scientific basis of the study visits and stimulate a deepened debate on the topic of Religious Education and diversity.

What else is new?

National Multiplier Event at UCL, England

England is delighted to host the first 'READY Religious Education and Diversity' Multiplier Event on Tuesday 13th June 2017 at the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), London and we're thrilled to confirm two outstanding speakers, Dr Farid Panjwani and Dr Elisabeth Arweck.



Farid is a resident lecturer at UCL IOE and the Director of the Centre for Research and Evaluation in Muslim Education (CRÈME). Farid teaches and writes about religious and intercultural education, philosophy and contemporary Muslim societies. Elisabeth is principal research fellow for the University of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU). She has a background in the sociology and anthropology of religion and has worked on a number of projects concerning religious diversity in relation to young people, religion and education.

The event will also be a networking opportunity for leaders in Religious Education from universities, professional bodies and schools. We will hear from this year's UCL IOE student teachers who will share their research on RE and diversity in school. As the first of three Multiplier events, READY participants will reflect on the Project's impact across Europe in its bid to disseminate relevant and useful information to support a growing religious diversity of pupils and stakeholders in European schools.

Lesson on diversity in Scotland

Think of Scotland, and you might come up with images of misty mountains, castles, whisky, the Loch Ness Monster – and Scottish tartan. Tartans are traditionally associated with Scottish clans such as the Clan MacKenzie, MacLeod or Morrison. A tartan is a symbol of belonging, connecting a person to a name, a geographical location, a history.

My purpose in creating lessons on 'identity tartans' was to get away from narrow definitions of Scottish identity based on ethnicity and instead:

- explore the complexities of personal identity
- show how individual identities can contribute to a sense of collective identity
- foster a sense of belonging within the class group

The lessons were part of a unit on Islam for S2 classes (ages 13-14).



The Islamic Tartan

After showing pupils images from the Islamic Tartan (www.islamic Tartan.com) website, I asked them to consider the different factors that make up personal identity (for example: language; place; family; religion; beliefs; personal interests). Pupils were then tasked with creating a unique personal identity statement and writing it out on a coloured strip of paper. The strips were woven together with ribbon to make a unique class 'tartan.'

The lessons have been a good way to encourage pupils to get to know one another better and to recognise how different their personal identities are. Some pupils were looked-after or adopted children, so it was important to stress the importance of personal interests, friends, school or community as identity markers and not to over-state the importance of ancestry. The images from the Islamic tartan website were particularly well received, challenging stereotypes and showing how cultural influences can be successfully combined.

by Anne Morrison
(PGDE Graduate, University of Aberdeen)

Going beyond

From dialogue to cooperation – Improving concepts of RE in Austria

Globalization and increasing religious diversity in Austria call for an enhanced religious dialogue in schools and RE. On the other hand, a non-partisan platform is currently advocating compulsory ethics teaching (including 'Religionskunde') instead of RE at Austrian schools.

How can cooperation - ecumenical and interreligious - based on dialogue be achieved within the existing denominational structures of RE in Austria? How can this subject contribute to a better quality of living together in diversity? What risks must be identified and managed? What opportunities arise? These central questions are presently being discussed by those responsible for RE - particularly in Vienna.

Children and adolescents are confronted with plurality anytime and anywhere (social media). At the same time, however, we no longer find what can be called 'intuitive' religiosity. For more and more people the (educational) question arises: What is my 'own' religion?

It is undisputed that RE must not only confront students with difference and plurality but enable them to adequately deal with diversity and pluralism. The basic prerequisite for this is the acquisition and improvement of interreligious competences. However, this can only be achieved if dialogue partners (pupils and teachers) are at least at times present in the RE lessons. Let's not talk about others, but with others.

All this calls for innovative and future-oriented concepts of cooperative RE which are being conceived and discussed in Austria right now. The insights of READY will make an important contribution to this.

by Heinz Ivkovits (KPH Vienna)

Book review

In the book "Secularization Revisited – Teaching of Religion and the State of Denmark 1721-2006" (2016) the author, Niels Reeh, Associate Professor at University of Southern Denmark, claims that instead of abandoning classical theories on secularization as obsolete, they are instead worth revisiting. Reeh does this through a historical sociological case study of the political decision-making concerning the teaching of religion in Denmark from 1721 to 2006. In this work he uses a state-centered perspective and through this perspective Reeh explores how the state, ever since the introduction of RE in schools, always transforms the religion of the people with a "keen eye to what served its own (the state's) vital interests" (p. 191).

RE was introduced in Danish compulsory schools 1721. Astonishingly, it was introduced by a military commission. Subsequently, RE was a vital area of interest groups. There was a hope that poor people would learn some basic skills in order to get a job. For peasants, however, the focus was just as much on making them loyal and obedient to the state through Religious Education as how to reach salvation. Thus, according to Reeh, education was almost completely religious in nature.

Even if the political importance of religion and RE has declined significantly since these times, Reeh shows how it increases during specific periods like during World War II, after the end of the Cold War and after the War of Terror was declared in 2001. These developments show the social significance of teaching of religion and how it can be used to support the interests of the state. The book is continuously interesting and well written. It is recommended for teachers of RE and students of Religious Studies.

by Kerstin von Brömssen (Karlstad University)