

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

## *Vignettes, Spots & Short Reflections*

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## 1

Catholic private school in Münster. Noble old building in a big park, exceptionally well equipped with media. Aside of “normal” classes there are laptop classes, in which textbooks, copied worksheets and exercise books are not used any more, in each class room technical equipment based on apple TV.

Protestant Religious Education is taught in this catholic school. Moderated by a young female teaching colleague, 16 pupils of an upper secondary course are sitting in table groups, are very polite, interested and highly motivated to compare the anthropology of Hobbes with the anthropology of Rousseau. The lesson is nicely arranged and well- structured, the climate for discussion open and pleasant.

Commentary of the colleague from London: **Teaching is very similar to teaching at home.** I ask myself (aware that it is a superficial impression of a single lesson): Why then, is protestant Religious Education in a catholic school, separated in confessional tracks? (In London they teach Religious Education for the whole class without separating them.)

The colleagues from Scotland are amazed how easy going and uncomplicated things are: No entrance controls, the teachers casually clothed, the pupils eat sandwiches during the breaks in the classroom. Apart from that: Also in Scotland could the teaching of Religious Education be similar, although they there call it “Religious and Moral Education” or “Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies“ and they also teach the entire class without denominational tracks ... **PK**

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## 2

**Swedish private school**, however 100 % funding by the state. Amazing as in all Scandinavian schools I have the privilege to visit: an impressive tranquility and calmness in the whole school building, in the staff room as well as in the hallways and classrooms. A large number of rooms for group work, a cafeteria, inviting recreation areas.

Noteworthy the splitting of the teaching in two long blocks of three hours, from 9 am to noon and from 1 pm to 4 pm. We can visit the afternoon class of a graduation course of 17 to 18 year old young people. The pupils are greet in a very friendly way, show a lot of interest, are researching about different religious communities and discuss along a given list of criteria, if the different faith groups should be considered “sects” or “cults”.

The pupils take the use of laptops for granted. As far as an observer can tell, they seem to stick to the assignment and they don't let themselves get distracted. Nevertheless the group of visitors wonders if an assignment like this couldn't be dealt with in a lower class at a German grammar school. Mental underload, not challenging enough? But in a discussion with the visitor group the pupils show a very intensive and sophisticated interest in in different ways of teaching Religious Education. They forget about the break they had agreed on and question us in very good English, why we separate the class in Germany and Austria according to the confessions of the parents and pupils. They argue, especially in the field of religion it should be important to become aware of differences, to learn different perspectives and to practice respectful living together. Our argument – learning in denominational groups might allow a deeper understanding of one's own

tradition, in which one has been brought up – doesn't seem to be plausible. Religious Education might be an interesting subject, but the pupils show a surprising distance to it: **"I am Swedish, I am not religious."**

The Scottish colleagues note the familiar and confidential relationship between teacher and pupils. The private telephone number of the teacher is written on the blackboard, obviously unimaginable in Scottish schools. **PK**

### 3

The female teacher of the class just described explains in an after lesson talk that, although having a very good relationship to the pupils, she would never let them know her own religious convictions. For educational reasons the pupils should not be influenced by this. After school, of course, but not in the role of a Religious Education teacher. The challenge is to get discussions going, to moderate them, to help everybody to find his voice, to exchange views, but not to confront young people with one's own opinions and convictions.

Oh, it's like that in Sweden, I conclude. At supper I meet a Swedish RE teacher who tells me the opposite: "If pupils want to know it, I, of course, explain to them very openly and also in detail **my own point of view** but I don't expect them to take over my way of seeing things." **PK**

### 4

The READY project group has been working intensively on organizational and strategic issues when a Viennese colleague, protestant theologian, suggests not to forget discussing content. His impression is that Swedes make do with the description and comparison of religious phenomena. The pupils also exchange opinions and valuations but basically the question of truth and the existential reference which is necessary for the understanding of religions are excluded. Martin uses the term **"truth claim"** and we notice in the body language of our Swedish colleagues but also of our colleagues from London and Scotland that they react with spontaneous rejection. No, a "truth claim" has should not have place in schools. Obviously the colleagues understand the expression "truth claim" in the sense of a claim of absoluteness und connect it with the idea of imposing other persons one's own concept of truth. My Tübingen colleague, Christof, teacher educator for ethics and philosophy, assists Martin and explains very competently and in details that exactly this is not meant by Jürgen Habermas, who also uses the term "truth claim". The name and philosophical approach of Habermas triggers positive connotations for the colleagues coming from Scandinavia and Great Britain but nevertheless they refuse to use the expression "truth claim". The debate is intensive and committed and is flaring up again in the evening accompanied by several glasses of beer and wine ... **PK**

## 5

Once again back to that class in Karlstad: In fact, we only observed the preparation of the planned lesson. While talking with the teacher, we noticed how disciplined and topic-focused the pupils were doing their tasks.

What would they have thought of our discussion about 'truth claims'?

Back in Vienna with my circle of friends: **Habermas** described himself as a 'religious unmusical person' (referring to the late Max Weber). A growing number of our pupils / students probably belongs to this group – would it have been the same in Karlstad? We wouldn't have found that out so quickly – in contrast to other schools in Karlstad ('What I (not) believe, remains with me').

Interreligious dialogue – yes, of course! But is there an equal number of supporters of a dialogue between believers and non-believers (not-in-that) believers? How does such a dialogue function in other countries / at home with 'religiously unmusical pupils/teachers'? Can a confessional RE at all start a conversation with atheists who are curious and willing to learn and normally do not attend our RE lessons? Is not all that part of the 'fullness of life'?

How do pupils elsewhere deal with religious terms? Do politicians, those responsible for education, parents, etc. still understand such terms? Is that the reason why our societies struggle with perceived or actual threats? Will we forever be accompanied and protected by hundreds of police officers as this year at the Vienna New Year's Trail?

Habermas has not been content with that, he strives to change it. In his youth, he was well aware of the vitality and power of persuasion of people of faith. An unmusical person might be inspired by music lovers to listen to music more intensively, to allow their innermost to be heard.

Can we expect this from our contemporary RE? Where is the best place in school for the living together of religious and non-religious persons? As it already happened in Austria when numerous religious and humanist 'helping hands' stood side by side to support the arriving refugees?

More and more refugee children have arrived in our schools, bringing along their culture and religion. The number of those without religious affiliation is constantly increasing (second largest group in Vienna). In what way can RE contribute to 'openness towards other cultures - without losing one's identity - and the acceptance of others ... in order not to run the risk to be a culture that seals itself off or shuts itself away?' (Kongregation für das Kath. Bildungswesen, 2013)

**How does the 'religious musicality of Christianity' sound in concert with other 'religious musical sensibilities'?**

I'm already curious what answers we will find in the coming religion classes in our partner countries. Especially by the affected students in those classes. Let's give them enough space to make their point! **HI**

## 6

Project meeting in Vienna, January 2016. Kerstin, our Swedish colleague, who understands German texts, discovers the word **“LehrerInnen”** in a German book and pronounces it in a slow and questioning way. The German and Austrian colleagues explain the background and the variations also used: *“Lehrer/innen”*, *“Lehrer\_innen”*

In English they don't have this problem, everybody agrees very quickly. What about the Swedish language, in a country which is a role model for emancipation and gender equality? Kerstin explains, of course there is a Swedish word for “Lehrerinnen” but it is not used any more. And if in a teacher training course there are only female participants? Then the Swedish also say “Lehrer” and nobody has a problem with it. European diversity! **PK**

## 7

The Scandinavian and British colleagues have, again and again, difficulties understanding what might mean denominational or confessional Religious Education in the German context. For them it is the same as catechetical or even missionary. One of the German colleagues quotes an official document of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) saying that Religious Education in a protestant perspective invites everybody to RE lessons and is based on educational arguments. It is considered to be a **“free service offered by the church to a free school”**. Perplexed faces follow. One of the Swedish colleagues asks cautiously: “What kind of service do you mean?” **PK**

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## 8

**RE Curriculum of the Grey Coat Hospital Church of England School / London ([www.gch.org.uk](http://www.gch.org.uk)), visited by READY partners on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Religious Education is a popular and challenging subject, studied by all students throughout Key Stages 3 & 4 and with excellent GCSE results. It is also a popular choice at A-level.**

The aim of our rich and varied curriculum is to enable students to be religiously literate as well as accomplished critical and philosophical thinkers. We encourage all students, whatever their faith stance

, to understand the impact of religious belief and to reflect carefully on their own values and beliefs. Varied teaching approaches engage and involve those with religious beliefs and other worldviews. Lessons frequently involve discussion and evaluation of the basis, nature and implications of religious belief and prepare students for the spiritual and moral challenges of the future.

Enrichment and Extra-Curricular Activities

At Key Stage 3 and 4 students have the opportunity to visit Westminster Abbey and other places of worship, as well as to speak to visitors from religious and other believers. In Year 9 there is a Faith Forum activity in which students spend a day encountering and learning from representatives of the six major world faiths.

At A-level students participate in a variety of revision conferences and in a department-led revision residential towards the end of Year 13.

The department plays a major role in debating in the school, where many topics are directly relevant to the RE curriculum.

### **Key Stage 3**

#### **Year 7**

Term 1 Introduction to world religions: Christianity, Judaism & Islam  
Term 2 Enquiry: Who is Jesus?  
Term 3 Enquiry: what is Truth?

#### **Year 8**

Term 1 Introduction to world religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism  
Term 2 Enquiry: how do we know? Arguments for God's existence; problem of evil  
Term 3 Humanism and atheism

#### **Year 9**

Term 1 Christian ethics: love & forgiveness  
Term 2 Christianity: 3 major traditions around the world  
Term 3 Inter-faith dialogue

### **Key Stage 4**

#### **AQA Religious Studies GCSE Specification B: units 2 & 3**

##### **Christian and other religious perspectives on contemporary moral issues**

**Year 10** Animal rights; Prejudice & discrimination; War & peace; Drug abuse; Crime & punishment

**Year 11** Matters of death (euthanasia & care of the elderly etc.); Abortion; Matters of Life (fertility & genetics etc.)

#### **A-level (Key Stage 5)**

##### **Edexcel Religious Studies 1 & 2**

##### **Philosophy of Religion & Religious Ethics**

**Year 12 (AS)** Arguments for God's existence (Design & Cosmological); Miracles; Problem of Evil; Religion & Morality; Utilitarianism; Situation Ethics; War & Peace; Sexual Ethics; Mind-Body Problem

**Year 13 (A2)** Arguments for God's existence (Ontological & Experience); Religious Language; Life After Death; Religion & Morality (contd.); Deontology, Natural Moral Law & Virtue Ethics; Meta-ethics

## School visit: Grey Coat Hospital Church of England School, 25 May 2016

Church of England school, state-funded, on a representative site in the vicinity of Westminster Cathedral

### RE class in Year 8

Before they were allowed into the classroom, the girls in their grey and light blue uniforms, hailing from very diverse backgrounds as was obvious from their complexion and the occasional head scarf, patiently queued in front of the door and ogled us curiously - four guests interested in what they were doing in their RE class.

Inside the classroom, one of the walls was papered with products of earlier lessons – student-made posters on Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism. Today's lesson was reserved for recapitulation before the upcoming exams.

The smart board already showed the assignment for the first part of the lesson:

1. Explain one thing you learned in Monday's lesson.  
***[Observer's notes: nice and effective, although a little random and unstructured]***
2. Who said the most useful thing?  
***[Praise for students who contribute a lot, but what about those who are not mentioned? Is it really important to remember who said what?]***
3. How did you learn best?  
***[Raises awareness for own learning strategies]***
4. What do you want to learn today?  
***[One more strategic question, but will there be enough room for this kind of choice?]***

On the one hand, this is really great awareness raising (especially on learning strategies) and a student-centred approach. On the other hand, the girls were not given much chance to stray from their task and work on a self-chosen topic as indicated in question 4. But all of them set to work at once and cooperated nicely with their partner.

Teacher guidance was friendly, professional and strict.

### Step 2:

The girls were given a set of *dominoes keywords* to cut out and work with. The learners had to connect any two words (concepts) and explain how they are related. Three of these links had to be explained in writing. Revision sheets from earlier lessons were consulted for help. (Here are some of the items on the domino bricks: brahma – brahman – the four noble truths – Trimurti – Buddhism – Sikhism. etc.)

Pair work with individual assistance from the teacher.

### Final step:

Typical exam questions were projected on the board and later handed out on a worksheet. The teacher pointed out that exam questions dealt with four different levels (comparable to our “Anforderungsbereiche”): 1a. Describe – 1b. Describe and explain – 2. Compare – 3. Evaluate

(There is no equivalent for the German word “Operator” – command words?)

Some of these tasks were quite demanding for a Year 8 and could easily be the topic of an essay for university students. According to the teacher, there are very bright pupils in this mixed ability classroom, who need to be stretched with the evaluation tasks. Others will not be able to score highly.

This RE lesson had a focus on knowledge, perhaps not surprisingly, since it was (efficient) exam preparation. The girls were willing to follow the teacher’s instructions and present their results. However there wasn’t much interaction in the plenary. Thus, assessment of depth of understanding is hardly possible. **IS**

## 10

Inge gave a detailed report of the RE lesson we were allowed to observe at **Grey Coat Hospital Church School of England in London**. Three amendments for my part, more concerning the environment and the frame in which the lesson took place:

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- Entering a British school for the first time, I was surprised we had to ring the door bell. The door opens and we enter a hallway similar to a hotel lobby. A receptionist, amiable and binding at the same time, welcomes us, asks us to sign the guest book: “time in”, “time out”, address, visitor badge ... “Please have a seat! (gesturing to a comfortable lounge corner with red leather sofas) A colleague will be with you right away ...”
- RE is taught one lesson a week in England. I have never seen in a German school, grade 8, such a systematic and disciplined preparation for an exam in my decades of experience in teacher education. The central exam at the end of the term seems to be of high importance, but it is also the very sophisticated methodological approach the young female teacher is applying.
- After the lesson the teacher, who gave the lesson, has other obligations. Two of her colleagues, are, however, very well informed about the structure of her lesson. Accompanied by a cup of coffee, they explain to us, the intention and purpose of this kind of revision lesson. Somebody mentions that there was little room for open discussion, the pupils were guided rather strictly. Are there other types of RE lessons? Yes! We get a very professional explanation of how RE teachers in this school make use of “philosophizing with young people”. **PK**

## 11

School Visit to **Archbishop Tenison's School, Kennington** (25/05/16). Same procedure as mentioned in (10) with signing in etc. We were met by two boys who led us to the Common Room where we had a brief talk with our host Alexis and then proceeded to the class room where Patrick awaited us.

Although a co-ed school for a couple of years we had an all-boys group, all but one with non-British background. To a large extent they are Christians of Pentecostal Churches and the like (90% Christian church going parents across the entire school). They have 6 RE lessons over 2 weeks.

There is little, quiet talking, no need to motivate or justify why one should do the tasks. Patrick is very strict in his way of communicating, starting off right away, no introduction. Patrick gave out different images with references to "3" (like a Twix bar [cookie/fudge/chocolate]; or an egg [shell/white/yoke] and asked the pupils to find the commonality. Then he gave out a very condensed piece of information on the **Trinity** and asked them to find analogies which might describe the Trinity. However, Patrick set out to tell them that in early Christianity people were stoned for committing heresy. Thus, if one pupil would find an analogy he would come out and present it. If another pupil would consider this as heresy he could stone (paper balls as "stones") the first one; however, the latter had to argue why he accused the first one of heresy; if he was wrong he would get stoned by the others, and so on. Eventually, they came to realize that it is not possible to draw these analogies because they always violate one or the other belief on the Trinity.

I was very impressed with the (Barthian) dogmatic clarity (one would wish for that when it comes to discussing vestigia trinitatis amongst Christian theologians) displayed by an atheistic teacher. Of course, we were kind of surprised about the method linking Christian dogmatics with violence. However, Patrick reassured us that the topic Religion and Violence has been and will be, again, on the agenda and that the pupils, by then, knew already about this problematic link. And: at one point it tended to escalate but then Patrick said: *I gave you permission to play the game; I did not give permission to go mental.*

The Trinity would be topic for another two lessons. **MF**

## 12

“If education is to help people **dance with difference**, we need faith communities and schools where people meet difference. We need communities and schools, where people of different cultures, beliefs and values can meet and learn to dance, however awkwardly or angrily they begin. We also need teachers and administrators who value the dance, who have some experience in negotiating difference, and who are willing to be learners in the process. In such a dance, no one has all the answers; if they did, the dance would cease and education would become stylised and rigid.”

Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore: Richness in Religious Education. Ethnic, Religious and Bio-Diversity. In: Leslie F. Francis et al. (2001): The fourth R for the Third Millennium. Education in Religion and Values for the Global Future. Dublin: Lindisfarne Books, p.115-135; l.c. p. 128.

## 13



Our partner institution in London, the University College (UCL), scored place Nr.1 in an international ranking list for teacher education institutions. Any of our institutions would be happy about this great success and use the award for marketing purposes.

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Strange and amusing contrast: A student locked up his mid-range and not particularly cleaned bicycle at the guard rail in front of the inscription.

Seriously: What are the **criteria for good education and good teacher education?** The USA dominates the ranking list of **QS University Ranking** ([www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings](http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings)). 13 out of the top 20 universities are US American, while the best German speaking university, the ETH Zürich, ranks place 12. And the first German university on the list is Heidelberg (place 49). The University of Vienna finds itself on place 156. **PK**

### Reflect, Respect & Achieve

A short walk from the underground station to the **Archbishop Tenison's School in Croydon**, a mixed Church of England secondary school federated with St. Mark's C of E Primary School. It has a long and established tradition of educating young people since 1685. What strikes the Austrian visitor first? „Austria Ski Trip: 39 students had previously been to Austria to ski for the first time. Students learnt the basics and then quickly progressed to be able to go to the very top of the mountain at 2500 feet!”.

A quick glance at the curriculum Religious Studies for that school:

Religious Studies is compulsory from Year 7–13. Students study a Multi-Faith curriculum in Years 7–9. Halfway through Year 9 they start their GCSE in Religious Studies. Boys have 2 periods a week in Years 7–9 and 3 periods a week at GCSE. GCSE Religious Studies consists of four modules from OCR World Religions: B571 & B572 – Christianity & B589 & B603 – Christian Ethics.

At AS/ A2 level, students follow the OCR AS/ A2 Christian Ethics and Theology course.

The Religious Studies Department at Archbishop Tenison's School has the motto “Reflect, Respect & Achieve”.

Not in the main building but in containers in the schoolyard do we find the location of our RE-lesson. Only boys with apparently non British background in the classroom (they have already started admitting girls in that school) wearing neat school uniforms. And very Christian first names (Emmanuel, Michael). There are quite a number of Christian families within the school's vicinity, we are told.

Year 7 (12 years old) - the lesson starts right away. The young RE teacher, Mr P. Havilland, has already been introduced to us as a pronounced atheist. Exciting to see how someone like him can teach religion (hardly imaginable in Austria– at least not officially). We are not introduced and do not seem to interest the bright kids either. The teacher professionally ensures discipline, but always with a wink and an almost comradely attitude.

The lesson theme appears quite challenging for this age group: Trinity. Text to read: **What is Trinity?**

The teacher names three learning objectives for this lesson: To know what Trinity is; understand Christian beliefs about Trinity; reflect on why it's so difficult to explain Trinity. To a great part my students would have certainly dropped out here.

There are four key sentences:

Each person alone is God. Each one is equal. Each one is eternal. Each one exists all the time at the same time.

Suddenly the teacher addresses ‘Heresy’ and that in former times somebody proclaiming heresies would have been stoned for that. Let's try this out (paper balls, of course; I had been apprehensive of something worse). Pupils have to think of analogies for the word ‘Heresy’. The teacher gives an example, some kids volunteer (which surprises me) and make an attempt. And the first stones are thrown, as the chosen analogies do not seem appropriate but constitute heresies. Throwing stones is funny, teacher exhorts the kids because also stoning has to proceed in an organised way (not too emotional).

No correct analogies are found, also the teacher's final example 'water-ice-steam' contradicts the belief (Why? Homework for the appreciated readers) and gets him some extra stones.

Lesson aim: Information what Christians believe and how they have explained this.

The pupils' obviousness to grapple with the topic seems to stem from their prior experiences (at least with some of them); but how would it work in a mixed-faith group?

I see some exciting incentives derive: For instance, Muslim pupils explaining this term from a Christian perspective. Or: Explaining their understanding of the Christian concept of 'Trinity' (three gods? heresy?) Doesn't happen (at least not as a dialogue) in our RE concept – not yet.

Short discussion with the teacher afterwards: Is a method like this (stoning) not rather counterproductive, too harsh? Should be considered. On the other hand: The pupils will probably not forget that lesson so quickly (kinesthetic approach).

Revision of the RE-Curriculum in England: Pupils studying religious education will be taught that Britain is traditionally Christian. Schools are allowed to focus 75% of their RE teaching on a single religion (plus more about Judaism), with the remaining 25% spent on "beliefs and teachings" and "sources of wisdom and authority" in a second religion.

Problem: RE teachers have had only small sections on e.g. Judaism during their training, which means they themselves are often not competent for that. That leads to obligatory in-service-courses starting this autumn.

Questions for consideration at home:

Religion can only be found in society in form of very specific religions (apart from "religious analogous" phenomena such as soccer), and therefore cannot be conveyed in abstract ways but only in actual manifestations: "To make religion matter in its specific nature; religion concerns human beings, can only come into its own through existential and expressive manifestation and be negotiated through a first-person speaker" (M. Schambeck).

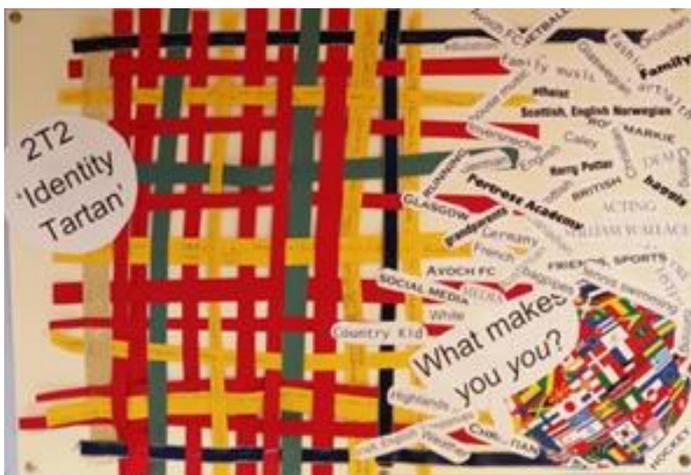
I will keep on considering (drawing on Englert: Connection impossible? In: Kenngott-Englert-Knauth (Hrsg): Konfessionell-interreligiös-religionskundlich. Unterrichtsmodelle in Diskussion, Stuttgart 2015):

Is it the function of RE to enable people to take position? Or is it enough to be aware of a lot and to know something? **HI**

Interesting discussions with the British and Scandinavian colleagues using terms I am not acquainted with:

- The RE class as a **safe space** to express convictions and beliefs, to deal with diversity within a learning group. What does this mean for the role of the RE teacher? What kind of teacher education does she or he need? (cf. Council of Europe (ed.): Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education. Strasbourg 2014, 47ff)
- The problem of **othering**, talking about “us” and the “them”. Who are **the others**, who **belongs** to “us”?

Back home in Tübingen, in the upper secondary RE course I am teaching. A student delivers an interesting and inspiring presentation about concepts of God in “Hinduism”. She often says: “in *our* religion”, “in *our* culture”, “*bei uns*”. She involves her class mates, a very critical group with quite a number of students who wouldn’t even call themselves “Christians” or “believers”, in a vivid discussion and almost everybody starts referring to “us” and “them”. I decide to prepare a lesson for next week on “Who are we?”, using the “tartans” the colleagues from Aberdeen brought in. **PK**



The Islamic Tartan is a registered Scottish tartan. It represents a visual weaving together of Scottish and Islamic heritage.

### Vienna school visit, 20.10.16 - English perspective

The teachers at the schools welcomed us warmly, and generously made time to talk to us before and after the lesson we observed.

Before the lesson, one of the teachers described the denominational “Religion” lesson as a safe space in the day where pupils can discuss anything they would like to – any issues that are bothering them. This indicated to me that teachers in this school consider their responsibility to go beyond delivering the curriculum, to encompass the well-being of pupils. This was good to hear, and chimes well with my understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teachers (though not necessarily solely of religious education teachers). The same teacher later explained that pupils who do not have denominational religious education do not attend an alternative class. This raised a concern for me – where is the safe space for these pupils?

The subject matter of the **Catholic lesson** we observed was “**The Sacraments**”. The class consisted of about ten twelve year old pupils. In a previous lesson, students had begun to create posters on the Sacraments in pairs – with each pair focusing on one Sacrament. In the lesson we observed, pupils were to complete and present their posters to the class. This lesson was staffed by a Catholic religion teacher and a “native English speaker”<sup>1</sup>, as the class is in the school’s “**bilingual stream**”. In addition to religious education aims and objectives, this lesson should also support students in English language learning. Although language learning is a reasonable priority for these pupils and essential preparation for adult life, I wonder if this organisation of it hinders pupils’ progress against religious education aims and objectives if their English language is not sufficiently developed to engage with the concepts and activities.

The lesson was regularly punctuated by the native English speaker briefly presenting a Sacrament in English. I was surprised at the way in which the presentation of marriage was handled. It was presented as being inevitable in the pupils’ lives, and no alternatives were presented or even acknowledged as possibilities - even the possibility of remaining single and not in a relationship, or in a non-married couple. Perhaps this will come in a later lesson. The native English speaker laid emphasis on staying married (that is, not separating or divorcing), as “marriage is part of a Covenant with God”. I wondered about how pupils with separation or divorce in their families might be feeling, and felt especially concerned for any in families currently going through the trauma of divorce or separation. It occurred to me that this lesson might not feel like a safe space for such pupils, and that these pupils might find it difficult to reconcile what was being taught with their lived reality. Later I wondered about the notion of a safe space for pupils. Is this the responsibility of a particular subject? What are the opportunities and challenges (for the subject, the pupils and the teachers) in making the provision of a safe space the responsibility of a single subject? Does the provision of a safe space fit with a particular understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education? Is it the role of religious education to provide a safe space, or would it be better-placed elsewhere in school life, where all pupils have access and are included? **JP**

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<sup>1</sup> It may be relevant to note that this member of staff was a member of an evangelical church rather than the Catholic Church, so this Catholic Religion lesson may have had a dynamic not representative of Catholic Religion lessons in general.

## Response to Jo's observation (Austrian perspective)

'Safe space': Several religion teachers see themselves relatively freed from the compulsion to cover a lot of subject matter in comparison with other subjects. Therefore, they tend to understand their lessons (and sometimes their subject as well) as a space for conversation and the discussion of personal experiences and visions. This, of course, does not mean that this is not done in other objects (such as German, philosophy, social learning, etc.) as well or that RE itself has become something like a fireside chat.

Nevertheless, this was by no means the case in that lesson, the kids were dealing with the material in a rather superficial way, and the concept of the lesson did certainly not allow the pupils' own experiences to flow into it. Although these experiences were always mentioned at the same time.

Obviously, it was the goal of the lesson to create a sort of list of the sacraments practiced in the Catholic Church, with their meaning and their symbols. If so, then it may fit. If, however, even at this stage, a greater reference to the actual life experiences of the pupils (divorced parents, various forms of living together as a family/patchwork families) should be established, some things would have to be worked on, perhaps also in the sense of exemplifying this connection on the backdrop of the life of the pupils.

But what was clearly recognisable is something else: this lesson was rather catechesis (very much introduced by the assistant teacher) than aiming at correlating life and faith. More about facts. The texts from the Bible were read rather sluggishly and without further explanation.

I believe the students have not taken away too much of this lesson with a view to bringing together religious content and their lives. But perhaps in one or the other lessons to come they will be given the chance to do so.

HI

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### Vignette of school visit (Sacre Coeur, private Catholic school in Vienna)

The entrance of the school building is near a subway station and seems quite plain among all the other buildings. After entering you find yourself in a reception room. The lady behind the desk asks a pupil (about 8-10 years old) to guide us to the staff room. A first thing to be noticed is that all pupils are wearing school uniforms and house shoes (later a teacher explains the purpose of that to us as following: the school can be kept clean and the feet of the children don't have to be in tight shoes all day). We are guided through a labyrinth of hallways, pass classrooms with primary and secondary pupils as well as kindergarten groups. Signs of Catholicism can be spotted, e.g. a portray of a cardinal in the hallway. The atmosphere in the school is not stiff, but not chaotic either. The volume is decent.

The class we visited consists of 18 pupils, mainly girls. They are about 15-16 years old. The room was quite tidy and practically furnished. A simple cross was hanging on the wall in the front, but apart of that no religious signs are noticed. Every pupil had his/her own bible on the desk. At the beginning a prayer was spoken together (everybody was standing), which referred to a personal God, not a God of a specific religion. After

everybody had made the sign of the cross, the lesson started. It was conducted by the teacher as well as a language assistant. In the beginning everybody was encouraged to name an associated word to the Gospel of Luke. Of course a lot of typical words as *God, Jesus, Jerusalem* were listed. However, some pupils showed a deeper knowledge by naming for example *doctor* or *gentile*. Straight afterwards a text about the Gospel of Luke was read together. Unfortunately, the focus seemed to be more on correct pronunciation of English words than on the content. There was no time for critical reflection. Only once in a while the content should be repeated by the pupils in their own words. At the end of the lesson a game of memory was played with the first verses of the Gospel. Because I participated myself, I noticed how my attention was raised. Unfortunately the lesson was over, before the bible verses could be sorted out. This meant that we could not experience any work with bible texts.

**Overall I was surprised that it was possible to pray with the whole class without any disturbance. And also the fact that they worked with bibles they owned themselves seemed surprising to me.** But because there was hardly any room for content-related contribution by the pupils, it is hard to assess how they relate to the subject. In some instances, it seemed difficult for them to express the content of the text read. Maybe this was due to the language barrier? But I could not imagine how critical discussions could have been facilitated, because the focus was quite strongly on the teacher and language assistant. Nonetheless I thought this was a good example showing how the own confession can be part of the lesson without evangelising the pupils. **JO**

### Response to Janika's observation

It's difficult to say whether such a lesson is typical or even specific of a Catholic private school. There are almost as many approaches to teaching RE as there are individual characters and personal forms of believing and belonging on the side of the RE teachers.

'Prayers' at the beginning are quite common, but not necessarily in the form of an actual prayer. For some teachers (and also pupils) it's more like a phase to calm down, to get away from the experiences of the previous lesson or the events of that school day etc. When I was teaching, I invited my pupils to bring along texts they thought would correlate with topics and contents of our lessons: newspaper clips, extracts from books or blogs, etc. and read them out (not necessarily at the beginning). In this way, we tried to connect everyday occurrences with perspectives from our religion/confession. Sometimes I handed out books with meditative short texts and invited them to choose one they could identify with or considered to be relevant.

This might be seen as an advantage of a confessional / denominational approach to RE, others interpret it more as opening space for sharing / discussing experiences or attitudes.

When we had the rare opportunity to teach kids from different religions together in a classroom, I invited them to bring along things that were of religious importance to them. Among them were also texts they were eager and willing to explain to the others. Several the kids quickly realised that there were similar written passages in their own religion, which normally started an interesting and committed debate. **HI**

### Vignette: School visit, Bundesrealgymnasium, Vienna (Oct 20, 2016, Swedish Perspective)

#### **Before the lesson**

The school is introduced as being “famous”, for its education. Famous, partly thanks to a previous Principal, who was well known in the area.

The students will be about 11 years old, we’re told.

Seems like a moderately large building. It’s quiet. The corridors are empty. Classes must be going on.

#### *Recess*

A bell rings, at around 11. Old fashioned sound. On that mark, the halls are filled with the familiar sound of children. The laughter and chatter are punctuated by chiming of keys that staff are carrying.

The atmosphere between staff and pupils seem to be warm. They laugh and joke with each other, as they meet.

Ten minutes later, the bell rings again, and the movement of children and staff seem to get a new direction.

#### **A meeting with teachers**

Since the 1990:s there’s been “bilingual classes”. There’s a talk about “native speakers”, on the one hand, and “bilingual kids”, on the other. *A positive way of talking about it; having more than one language, being bilingual.*

Other schools have a “dual-language” approach, which is explained as being something of “bilingual light”. There’s one school which has the same bilingual approach as this one, but with French instead of English.

Every other lesson would be in German; every other in English.

A perk of the bilingual approach is a sensitivity to words. There’s almost automatically a discussion on terms; what does this word actually mean, how could it be translated.

There will be among 10 students in the class, we’re told. Some students are “ORB” (other religious belonging). Officially unaffiliated. Teacher: “I like to start with a prayer.” As an introduction (to praying) a first step would be to share silence. Later prayer will be introduced.

Textbooks are provided.<sup>2</sup>

Our visit “came as a surprise” to the teacher, so the planning isn’t adapted to us; it’s “the usual class”.

#### *In the classroom*

Recess is still going on when we enter. **(12:03)** Loud laughter among the pupils. There is free play going on in the room. Some are eating sandwiches; some are drinking from bottles.

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2 See scanned pages of one such textbook, *The Usborne Book of World Religions* by Susan Meredith; separate document.

The lesson has started. **(12:07)** The pupils stood up to greet the teacher, but not in an “overly-disciplined manner”. They were all, teacher included, laughing. She (the teacher) tried hushing them down a bit, but didn’t put too much effort behind it.

They’re talking more in German than English.

She tells them to take out the work they’ve done so far. Presenting the sacraments. An A3-paper with text and drawings. Some students start working; she walks around among them.

10 students. Three boys; seven girls. Most are working in pairs<sup>3</sup>.

They’re working. **(12:14)** Chatting. Light atmosphere.

The other teacher enters the room.<sup>4</sup> **(12:16)** She greets the class, and then joins the other teacher in walking around the class, talking to the groups who are working.

The teachers discuss among themselves on how they should proceed.<sup>5</sup> **(12:19)**

“The native” (T2) explains that “these are words you need to know regardless of religion”, referring to the sacraments.

Time for the pupils to start presenting their work. **(12:28)** First up is marriage. The pupils are explaining (two girls). T1 (“the German speaking teacher”) interrupts with some additional information every now and then. She asks the pupils about details, for them to elaborate on. The subject is somewhat sensitive; the pupils are giggling.

T2 have them read from a English Bible. Matthew. “What god has joined together let no man...”

Emphasis on eternity. Covenant. Forever.

The presentations continue.

T2 explains from her own point of view. Doesn’t explain from the children’s point of view, but her own. T2’s own explanation in simplified terms.<sup>6</sup>

More Bible reading.

All the girls have long hair. All the boys short. All wear pants or (only girls) tights.

When the bell rings, they all jump up on reflex. Are stopped by the teacher.

### *Discussion afterwards*

The two teachers are split between two schools, so there is little time for joint planning.

The *lehrerplan* can be found at the Churchboard of Education; only in German.

The teachers pick and choose material from here and there. Copies from books. This is especially true for English content.

L2 explains that the effort is “to bring a low level of information to them”.

### *Some closing reflections*

- The “native speaker” didn’t have a teacher education. She mentions wanting to bring “a low level of information” to pupils. Furthermore, it did not feel like she had reflected much on the way she talked

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3 2B + 2G + 3G + 2B + 1B.

4 She’s originally from South Africa, we were told in the previous meeting.

5 Later they tell us they have little time to discuss lessons beforehand.

6 I doubt the children understood much.

about religion with the pupils. Her reference point was her own religiosity. The way she talked about religion seemed to be heavily influenced by it. The sacraments “are words you need to know regardless of religion,” for instance. She’s there due to being “a native speaker”, but what else does she bring to the classroom, and how does it affect it?

- Two teachers with a group of 10 pupils. One teacher per five students. Quite the luxury! **KN**

## 19

### Reflections and Notes While Packing the Suitcase for the Study Visit to Aberdeen

Dealing with diversity is one of the main challenges of modern life. Schools and Religious and Ethical Education are to prepare children and youth for living together in an increasingly pluralistic society. The competence to deal with plurality (“Pluralitätsfähigkeit”) is therefore a key term of an official document on RE recently published by the Protestant Council of Churches in Germany (EKD): [https://www.ekd.de/download/religioese\\_orientierung\\_gewinnen.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/download/religioese_orientierung_gewinnen.pdf)(English Version in preparation)

Another basic document of the Protestant Council of Churches in Germany “Christlicher Glaube und religiöse Vielfalt in evangelischer Perspektive” (“Christian Faith and Religious Diversity in Protestant Perspective”) also highlights “living together with members of other religions and world views” as a “theological and practical challenge”: [https://www.ekd.de/download/christlicher\\_glaube.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/download/christlicher_glaube.pdf)

“Diversity” – just as other educational terms – is a working term, with a certain vagueness and obvious ambiguities. The READY guidelines for study visits, version 2017, pp. 22ff) include a helpful glossary with working definitions considering the semantic and factual context of the word “diversity”, e.g. ‘difference’, ‘heterogeneity’, ‘intersectionality’, ‘plurality’, ‘pluralism’.

In German language see also: Rainer Möller, Von Diversität bis Pluralität. In: CI-Informationen 2/2016, pp.5-6. <https://comenius.de/Comenius-Institut/ci-informationen.php>

In the context of the READY project “diversity” should be discussed under at least three aspects:

1. Regarding different forms of Religious and Ethical Education in different European countries, including the issue of an appropriate approach to RE teacher education.
2. Regarding communication and interaction in concrete school and class room situations.
3. Regarding the curriculum and the content of what is being taught in Religious and Ethical Education.

One of the key issues which came out of the discussions within the READY project is the role of the RE teacher, their own religiousness and the didactical possibility or necessity to bring in personal convictions and “truth claims” (see the working paper by Heinz Ivkovits / Vienna: “Now tell us please, what you believe! Do RE teachers have to be religious or believers?” and the READY document “Vignettes, Spots & Short reflections”, vignettes 3 & 4).

A second key issue seems to be the question, whether neutrality in terms of religions and world views is something which is possible and desirable in RE classrooms. See for this the discussion between teacher students from Tübingen / Germany and Karlstad / Sweden.

A third interesting issue turned out to be the relationship between intercultural and interreligious learning. Which of the two categories should have the lead? See the teaching module developed in Tübingen “Cultural Diversity in Ethics and Religious Education”.

Finally it would be worthwhile to have a closer look at concepts such as “safe space” or “othering”, up to now little known in German discourse: For whom the RE classroom should be a “safe space”? Which conditions are to be met? What kind of qualifications do teachers need to moderate a safe space? – Who are “we”? Who are “the others”? See vignette Nr. 15 and the teaching module “La Cour de Babel”. **PK**

## 20

### Vignette While “Unpacking“ The Suitcase

The suitcase has in fact already been unpacked for some weeks. But I am still sorting the impressions, photographs and materials of our “learning activity”. And I am rethinking the chances offered by “learning diaries” and “reflective journals”. Considering my own personal way of learning and working, I am probably not the person who would have enjoyed something like a portfolio during academic studies and teacher education. So I follow the recent debates on mandatory and optional portfolios, about development and assessment types of them, about standardised, semi-structured, creative, digital and blended portfolios, about the relation between paperwork and outcome, about innovation, monitoring and control – with great interest but also a certain amount of skepticism.

First outcome of our study visit: Studying the Scottish system of education we Germans can indeed learn a lot about the possibilities and limits of portfolio-based teacher education. The Scottish colleagues look back on years and decades of experience with this approach and they are years ahead of us. This will be mentioned on various pages of this documentation.

Next, while sorting and arranging material for this learning diary, I had to admit that a reflective journal – in spite of my original reluctance – proved to be an excellent tool for our Tübingen “learning community”. We arrived in Scotland with relatively open and also differing questions about “Religion and Diversity” and sometimes we did not exactly know what to expect from the program points prepared by our friendly and caring hosts. Then again, as always in life, the actual days sometimes were full of surprises and quite different to what we had imagined in our minds. Altogether we all would have liked to see more of Scottish schools – probably much more than a one week study visit can ever provide.

In this context I would like to share the information that the ERASMUS plus program offers to teachers and educational staff quite a number of opportunities for a deeper immersion in another European context (key action 1): <https://www.kmk-pad.org/programme/erasmusplus/leitaktion-1-fortbildung.html>

While arranging this documentation we did not try to harmonize the different approaches, insights and perspectives of the members of our traveling group and we also did not try to eliminate a certain degree of

overlapping. Nevertheless passing in review the days of the study week and trying to summarize our reflections we came up with surprising convergences – a “learning outcome” which might be a perfect background and starting point for the reciprocal visits of the Scottish colleagues.

A documentation can this way not only be an obligatory paper to be done or an information and show case for others. It can indeed help to structure and intensify learning processes.

Among the issues which were raised during the study week again and again and on which I want to continue reflecting on, I would like to mention only five:

1. The perspectives of **learning about religion** and **learning from religion** obviously can't be assigned to certain countries as Scotland or Germany. Both didactics seek to realize, to connect and to interlink both kinds of learning. And how exactly this can work is our common concern. What exactly “learning from” can mean, should be discussed in detail and we should have together a close look at classroom situations and teaching examples.

Side note: An understanding of competencies based on measurable outcomes seems to invalidate the best didactical intentions in any country ...

2. During the week in Aberdeen, we did not necessarily clarify the term “**diversity**”. It seems that the working definitions brought along became in a non-German context even more tentative and provisional. I was, however, impressed by the declared intent of Scottish educational policy, to face and to affirm the phenomenon of diversity and to declare it a national goal to learn how young citizens can deal with it.

In this context a model of Religious Education splitting children and youth into different groups according their often only formal religious affiliation must seem strange, definitely when these different groups are not brought together any more for having dialogues and debates about their different faith traditions.

On the other hand we noticed, that Religious Education “for all” doesn't guarantee either that diverse world views and religious traditions are given a distinct voice. Sometimes a RE “for all” might even cover and keep secret diversity.

The common goal of the German and the Scottish model of teaching RE should be, to become aware of diversity, to articulate diversity, to respect the differences, to see diversity of perspectives as an opportunity to enrich life.

3. The example of Scotland shows that there can be very **different ways of educating RE teachers**. One can integrate the induction year (in Germany 1 ½ years of “Referendariat”) into university studies. It is possible to reduce the induction phase to one year and even our long way of studying religious studies or even theology before becoming an RE teacher doesn't seem to be self-evident..

Impressive, sometimes also irritating appeared to me how everybody in the Scottish system continuously used and referred to professional standards, success criteria, feedback and meta-reflection – without complaining and questioning the procedure.

Very professional and far ahead of our situation in Tübingen is also the use of digital media in Scottish teacher education and we also noticed a rather consequent modularization of all teaching processes.

Since we are discussing all these issues intensively in Germany, trying to find a more effective way of teacher education, it will be good to have in mind these concrete and practical examples when new reform proposals come up at home.

4. I notice the temptation to process the huge amount of impressions by categories as “we” and “they”. **Othering** in the pink of condition”. In a way these kinds of comparisons might be inevitable and for psychological reasons even necessary and I also discover myself again and again joining this game.

Generalization will however become dangerous and obstruct insights, whenever we connect observations and valuing too quickly, especially when we try to explain complex settings by monocausal arguments.

Thinking more thoroughly about it, we all know that the few days of a study visit just showed us isolated, somehow coincidental examples of Scottish Religious Education. And we all know that the teaching reality in German is also very diverse, complex, contradictory and above all not always delightful.

A good counterbalance to othering I found the intensive, inquiring and ruminative talks we had with our Scottish colleagues about concrete classroom situations. Over and over again I was surprised, \_also in the wider context of the entire READY project , how quickly experienced colleagues from different European countries, with very different concepts of Religious Education and very diverse forms of teacher education, would agree on what is didactically desirable and what not.

Is there beyond all theories and concepts something like a deep structure, some kind of common grammar of teaching RE, which might help us all to see regional debates and controversies in a new and also more relaxed perspective?

5. After the week in Aberdeen I am even more convinced that it is absolutely necessary to integrate our colleagues who teach Ethics and Philosophy into the READY project. Scottish RME teacher often studied philosophy and not theology. Philosophy with and for children (“P4C”) is one of the main methods in Scottish Religious Education. And if some of our colleagues plead for teaching Ethics and Philosophy “to all”, the Scottish model can show you one of many possibilities how such a school subject could look like and how it could be filled with content. **PK**



The group meets outside the Abbey just before 9AM. David changes from sneakers into his "Church shoes".

Grey-clad girls walk into the Abbey in a steady stream. Others are stopped: "Private ceremony," the guard says.

We meet Jane inside. "We can't go in now," she says. "They're standing." Jane greets people we meet (including a priest; I later learn her name is Jill) in a friendly manner.

*It is clear we are with an insider. Someone who, through behaviour and explicit instruction, informs us how to behave in order not to stand out too much. It makes all the difference. We are brought into not just the building, but the community, as guests.*

### The Service

The headteacher, Ms. Maddrell, greets us once we have found our seats.

Early in the service, two pupils (year 7) say some words (The First Reading, Isaiah 42.1-4) from behind a speaker's stand. Literally behind it. The pupils are so short they can't even be seen. (But that's where you're supposed to stand!)

Ms. Maddrell reads from the Gospel (John 8:1-11) at 9:27.

Both the priest in charge of the service and Jill (the latter specially invited to give a sermon) make a point of where we are: at "the center of our nation".

*We're surrounded by kings and queens of England. Westminster Abbey is where the coronation of the British monarch takes place. Central institutions of the government can be found in Westminster, including both 10 Downing Street and Buckingham Palace. (See some points of interest in Figure 1.) The slogan of Westminster Abbey seems to be "Faith at the heart of the nation".<sup>7</sup>*

Excerpt from "History of the School" by The Grey Coat Hospital. Retrieved March 8 2017 from <http://www.gch.org.uk/History-of-the-School>

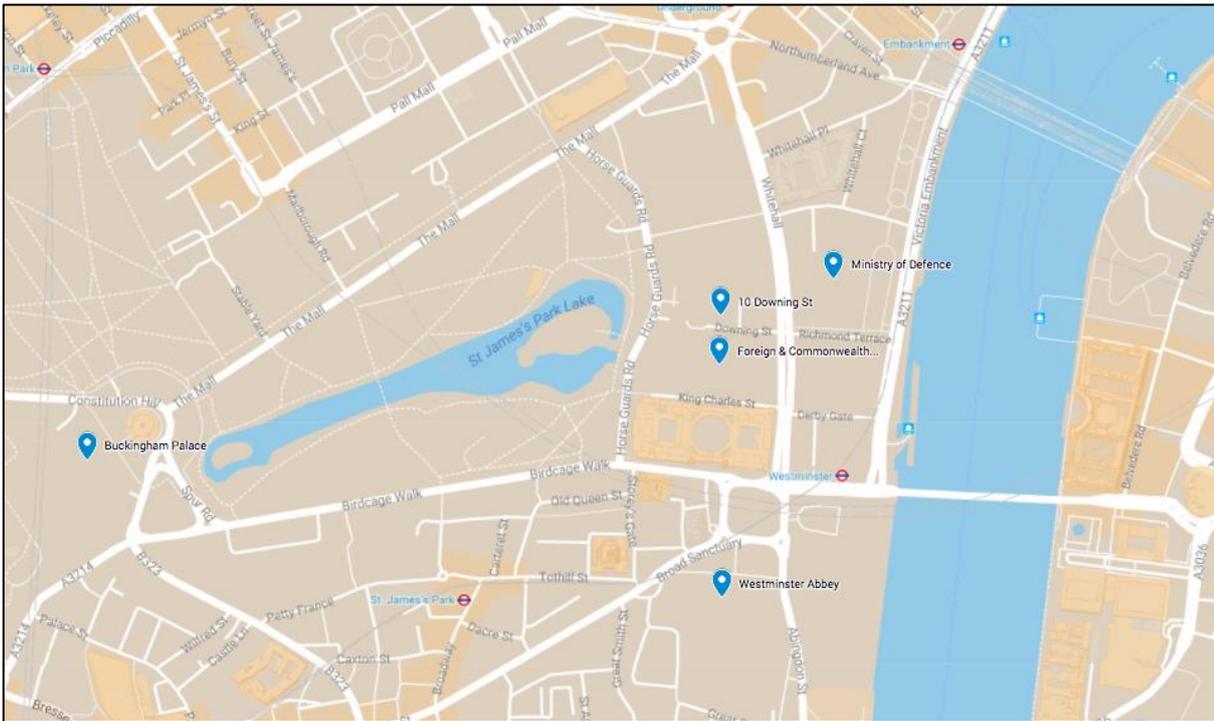
In 1666, after the Great Fire of London, many inhabitants of the Old City of London moved to the medieval town of Westminster.

With its congested and squalid alleys, the area was the home of many criminals who, until 1623, had the right of sanctuary in the Abbey. It was in the first seedy area – home to every type of vice and depravation - that The Grey Coat Hospital was founded.

On St Andrew's Day in 1698, eight parishioners of the parish of St Margaret's each invested 12/6 (65p) towards the founding of the school. The aim of the founders was to give an education to the poor of the parish so that they could be 'loyal citizens, useful workers and solid Christians'. In 1701 the Governors purchased the old workhouse in Tuttle fields (Tothill Fields) from Westminster Abbey and established a school for both girls and boys. St Andrew's stands on the original site of the Elizabethan workhouse, the flagstones of which are walked over daily. After a colourful history which included a murder in 1773 and a rebellion in protest against the dreadful conditions of the school in 1801, the school became a day school of girls in 1874. The Headmistress at that time was Elsie Day, one of the great pioneers of girls' education.

The hospital has undergone continuous development over the last few years and is provided with excellent facilities in all spheres. In 1998 The Grey Coat Hospital celebrated its tercentenary with the opening of a brand new

<sup>7</sup> "Home". Westminster Abbey. Retrieved March 9 2017 from <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/home>



(9:40) “Let us Pray.” Following the words, all students immediately bow their heads (quite low indeed). Three pupils lead the prayer.

(9:55) All take communion. (*Our gatekeeper, Jane, is among the people administering it.*)

*After the service, going from the Abbey to the Abbey’s Educational Office<sup>8</sup>, we stand among the pupils who, presumably, are returning back to their school. I overhear some girls talking: “No, he’s not here. He’s Catholic; they’re not allowed.”*

### Educational Office

We’re given a presentation by Laura, “one half of head of education.” She describes how they emphasize the link between RE and History, and between Christianity and Nation. They have recently started “British Values” –tours.<sup>9</sup> Another popular tour is “Pilgrimage”. The latter is about the Abbey as a site of pilgrimage to Edward the Confessor, who founded the Abbey.

“There’s so much to look at that it is distracting.” She explains that they try to direct the pupil’s attention to “our areas”.

It is particularly challenging for Muslim groups, Laura says: there are so many images; so many gods, as they see it.

After the presentation in the office, we are given a guided tour of the Abbey.

<sup>8</sup> “Education”. Westminster Abbey. Retrieved March 9 2017 from <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/education>

<sup>9</sup> This is also advertised at the landing page of Education Westminster Abbey (2017).

## Reflection

It is interesting to note the strong link between the Anglican church and the nation, and, even more interesting, how openly this can be expressed and used.

In the departmental advice regarding British values, issued from the UK Department of Education in 2014, the “fundamental British values”: “the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (p. 5). The last point, regarding respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, is also explicitly mentioned elsewhere (p. 4). Christianity is not mentioned at all. Yet that is what Westminster Abbey Education highlights: “On our new British Values tours, [...] students can explore how the Christian faith underpins our country’s values.”<sup>10</sup>

In the “British Values Guided Tour” folder, the “British values” cited above is mentioned almost in its entirety: “British Values of individual liberty, democracy, the rule of law, respect, tolerance” (p. 1). What is lost, when compared to the original is “*mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs*” (Department of Education 2014, p. 5, my emphasis). Furthermore, the text in “British Values Guided Tour” continues with stating that these values “can be considered (although are not exclusively) Christian values held by the people who worship and are remembered at the Abbey.”<sup>11</sup> I would not dare disagree. And it is easy to see how thankful it is to use the links between Christianity and Nation through the building of the Abbey itself, and its history. But it would also be very interesting to see if it would be possible to use the same material to promote mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. **KN**

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<sup>10</sup> “Education”. Westminster Abbey. Retrieved March 9 2017 from <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/education>

<sup>11</sup> “British Values Guided Tour”. (2017, unpublished). Westminster Abbey Education.

### Vignette Westminster Abbey Visit



When I heard, we were invited to visit an Ash Wednesday school service in Westminster Abbey I was obviously excited about this opportunity. After a short search, I even found the entrance. This just made it clear how grand the church building is. Many girls, well dressed in school uniforms, entered the church in an organised and orderly manner one after the other. We followed them into the building. The high ceiling and majestic arches impressed instantly. We walked over to the quire and sat down in first row. The church filled up while organs, a choir and different music groups played quietly in the background.

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The service itself was short, strongly influenced by liturgy, but also modern (gospel?) songs were sung. For large parts, it seemed more like a catholic service than a protestant one. All pupils behaved in an exemplary manner und there was no disturbance during the whole ceremony. The sermon by the female priest was about the contemporary issue of the influence of social media on the self-esteem of the pupils. Consistent with Ash Wednesday she encouraged the girls to occasionally switch off their smartphones and fast social media. The biggest surprise to me was that for communion they used a sweet vine and not grape juice, which is common in German school services. Everybody needed to come to the front, but the ones that did not want to take communion could take their programme as a sign with them. The priests only blessed them. All in all the school service was an interesting mixture of a lot of tradition, some political references and modern day songs as well as current themes that were touched.

After the service, we went next door to the Education Department of Westminster Abbey. Laura, one of the heads of the department, showed us a short introduction video about the Abbey and explained to us different aspects of their work. Their focus lies on tours for British school classes, but they also have programmes for (international) groups starting from kindergarten up to senior citizens. They also cooperate with outside groups, e.g. science groups. A whispering went through the group, when she explained how their tours exemplify British values. As an international group we were wondering why the values mercy, peace, justice and truth are called specifically “British”. Overall, it was striking how especially in Westminster Abbey there was a very strong connection between the state and the Church of England. Many times the building seemed more like a museum of English history than a church. This also reflected some of the programmes we were introduced to by Laura. **JO**

### Informal talk at the Hare Krishna Temple

Having heard of my field of interest, Alexis was kind enough to organize a meeting with a representative, henceforth called “Radha”, from ISKCON London ( <http://www.iskcon-london.org> ). The following text focuses on one thread from the discussion we had.

The “London Radha Krishna Temple” is centrally located, just off Oxford Street. I meet up with Radha in the evening, and we sit down in the temple shop for an informal chat. Alexis had told me she is involved schools and such, and I ask her to tell me more.

Radha explains how they, at the temple, explain and inform those who are interested.

Radha also tells me that she is a member of the local SACRE – council.

*This means that she is involved with shaping the local RE-syllabus. Alexis later describes how every local area has their own SACRE, and write their own syllabus for RE. Individual schools can choose to follow the local SACRE syllabus – or not; or any other.*

Radha is often asked by teachers to come teach at the school. “It’s much easier for us, isn’t it,” she says, “who are in the religion.”

*I come to think of the Ofsted report (2013) which describes both confusion among teachers regarding the purpose and aims*

*of RE (p. 14) and weaknesses in teachers’ understanding of the subject (p. 9). If one is unsure about the subject, both purpose and content, then it seems reasonable to expect it would be difficult to teach. That it would be easier to invite someone with a purpose and with in-depth knowledge, albeit from an emic perspective. The following is purely speculation, without having even had a glance at the RS syllabus Radha has been involved with, but I wonder what perspective comes forth therein? Is it a collection of emic perspectives? The ISKCON - take on Hinduism would be one such (which, perhaps, is also made to represent “Hinduism” as a whole). If this*

*Excerpt from “SACRE” by The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Retrieved March 8 2017 from <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/children-and-education/schools/school/sacre>*

Every Local Education Authority (LEA) is required by law to have a SACRE. Its origins go back to the Education Act of 1944, but the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1996 strengthened its place in an LEA. The responsibilities of SACRE are:

- to provide advice to the LEA on all aspects of its provision for Religious Education (RE) in its schools (this does not include Voluntary Aided Schools)
- to decide whether the LEA's Agreed Syllabus for RE needs to be reviewed and to require the LEA does so
- to provide advice to the LEA on Collective Worship in its schools (this does not include Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled Schools)
- to consider any requests from Head teachers to hold Collective Worship that is not of a broadly Christian character
- to advise on matters relating to training for teachers in RE and Collective Worship
- to publish an annual report of its work

A SACRE is made up of four committees:

1. representatives of Christian denominations and other religions and their denominations which reflect the principal religious traditions of the borough
2. representatives of the Church of England
3. representatives of the teaching profession
4. representatives from the LEA, including Councillors and RE advisors

would be the case, I could imagine how it would be even more difficult for a teacher not coming from this tradition to be able to teach that particular perspective. And even more natural to ask someone from the tradition to teach it?

Giving the pupils opportunities to meet and experience a living tradition, so to speak, is valuable indeed. Radha also explains how she strives to help pupils locate her tradition in the wider web that is Hinduism. She might indeed do this brilliantly. However, I hope that teachers that invite her also frames the experience with more knowledge, prior and after the experience. Giving other examples how, for instance, Krishna and the Bhagavad Gita might be interpreted by other Hindu traditions. **KN**

### READY Vignettes Dr Graeme Nixon (University of Aberdeen)

As part of the READY project we have been visiting a range of schools in the participating countries and asked to write short reflective vignettes on these experiences. This has evolved with the project, leading to deeper reflections on the approaches to diversity and pedagogy in RE. This process is one whereby we can hold up a mirror to approaches to RE within our own country.

Early READY meetings in the first year of the project had allowed us to visit secondary schools in Munster (Germany, September 2015) and Karlstadt (Sweden, December 2015). Both of these had offered interesting experiences. The German lesson was very similar to lessons that would take place in Scotland in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies. The 16 year old pupils were involved in a meta-ethical discussion of the principle approaches to moral decision making (Utilitarianism, etc). The Swedish lesson for senior pupils was an investigation allowing pupils to apply established criteria to organisations to assess if they were a cult or a religion. In both these lessons I was struck by the maturity of the pupils and the lack of formality compared to Scottish schools. The pupils were engaged, polite and enthusiastic. The Swedish pupils confidently addressed and interrogated the various academics in the room about the READY project and RE in our countries! The Swedish lesson was particularly interesting in that the narrative location of the lesson was explicitly secular. That is, the discussion was a forensic and objective analysis of what qualifies as religious completely out with any religious narrative or location.

On neither of these early visits did I take detailed notes. However, as the READY project has evolved I have become increasingly attentive to the experiences and what follows are more developed reflections than I have offered for Munster and Karlstadt.

#### 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016 London

##### *Grey Coats Hospital School*

This school visit was to an all-girls school in central London very close to Westminster. In fact, during a later READY meeting we were allowed to attend their school assembly which celebrated the beginning of Lent and took place in Westminster Abbey. Though Grey Coats is a state school (not private) the appearance (the uniform, ethos, antiquity and location at the heart of Britain's imperial capital) was of privilege and high attainment.

That said, the school has a diverse range of pupils in terms of background. Though the former prime minister and ministers send their children to Grey Coats, there are also children in attendance from less affluent and privileged backgrounds.

The lesson involved little teacher led pedagogy. It was a revision of materials on the Dharma traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism). This was a large class of 13/14 year old girls. They were attentive and engaged throughout. The teacher led the learning with confidence and attentiveness. She began with a recap of how they were to work in pairs to prepare for the forthcoming exam. The lesson also incorporated some personalisation and meta-cognitive approaches in that the teacher reprised earlier discussion of learning styles and preferences.

The approaches to learning, which will be mirrored in the exam, allowed pupils to describe, explain compare and evaluate. This allowed pupils to learn about and from the materials. The evaluation questions were challenging and interesting. For example, inviting pupils to consider the merits/demerits of belief in reincarnation.

This closely mirrored the approaches we advocate in Scottish RE where pupils are encouraged to compare the materials studied to their own life experiences and views.

In the post lesson discussion with the department head for RE I was struck by the extent to which approaches to RE in the school were linked to theoretical underpinnings for RE pedagogy. He described his department as having a 'critical realist' approach to truth claims within RE. This led me to reflect that many Scottish RE departments may not have so thought out a philosophy for how they teach the subject.

## **20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 Vienna**

### *The Background and Discussion with school Staff*

This school visit was to observe a bi-lingual RE lesson on the sacraments. Prior to the observed lesson we met with the head of department who provided an overview of the bi-lingual scheme. This has been in place since 2000 for pupils aged 10-18. In these lessons there are two teachers, including a native speaker who team teach the materials. At present this is principally in English and attempts to introduce bi-lingual lessons in Turkish and Arabic have been met with challenges. In the school we visited there were only about 4 children from refugee families.

The class was a Roman Catholic RE lesson for 11 year olds, with some who may opt in who have no religious affiliation. In Austria children can decide for themselves about attending RE lessons from 14 years. There is no alternative provision for pupils who are withdrawn. In Austria there is no provision for those out with faith communities. When asked, both teachers present felt that RE needs teachers who are themselves religious.

In the lesson pupils were presenting collaborative posters on the sacraments. This would also provide an opportunity for the introduction and reinforcement of English vocabulary. The native speaker (from South Africa) belongs to an evangelical Christian group in Vienna. It was suggested that this allows the pupils to experience diverse Christian perspectives as she, and the class teacher, discuss their views. I wondered if this diversity could be extended? Would it be permissible for the native speaker to be atheist, or non-Christian? I also wondered about the question of how qualified the native language speaker was in terms of effective and sensitive approaches to RE?

### *Observations*

The classroom was the place where the class attend all their lessons. When we arrived the pupils were in a ten minute break between lessons. The children were unsupervised. When the lesson began there were only ten pupils, despite evidence (jotters, school bags) indicating that the class was much larger than this. This made me wonder about where the others were. Were they withdrawn from RE? If so, what were they doing? What provision was made for them? RE was presented by the school staff as a 'safe space' concerned with holistic care of the children. Where and how was this provided for those absent from the lesson?

The pupils were finishing a group poster task on the Christian sacraments. They were then to present these to the teachers and their peers. The native English speaker arrived late to the lesson as she had travelled from another school.

The poster was to be in German, but supporting worksheets were in English. The narrative voice on the worksheets unequivocally identified with Catholicism (unsurprisingly, though such narrative privileging of one religious perspective was entirely new to me). I was intrigued by one claim on the information sheet given to pupils that there was no magic in the sacraments, simply the work of the Holy Spirit!

There seemed to be little value in the task beyond reproducing vocabulary. Perhaps this is a weakness of the bi-lingual approach where in-depth consideration of a subject is side-lined in favour of linguistic development? There was no critical or analytical discussion, no asking the pupils about their experiences or beliefs. Therefore it was hard to discern any aspect of the lesson that addressed or delivered diversity. The approach was monolithic. For example, marriage was presented in very traditional terms, making me wonder to what extent this lesson mirrored the life-world of the pupils and life in modern Europe.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> March 2017 The Charter School, London**

This was a visit to school in south London. This was a mixed sex, state comprehensive school within a mixed catchment area. The school was a modern and in the welcoming atrium we could discern the three school values of Family, Responsibility and Perseverance. There was much going on with teachers and pupils engaged in fundraising and charitable activities. There were many indicators and prompts for positive ethos around the walls such as celebrations of current and former pupils, theatrical events, book exchanges, film club, and posters linking inspiring figures to the school house system.

The lesson was for a large year 8 class (14 year olds). Despite the fact that there was barely room for the pupils, let alone the READY visitors, the teacher led the lesson calmly and with aplomb. The lesson was about the Philosophy of Religion focusing on cosmology and the Genesis account of creation. As with many Scottish lesson learning intentions were shared and copied by the class. The prior learning and context for the lesson was well established. Throughout the lesson there was minor disruption by pupils much as one would observe in a Scottish class of the same age. The teacher dealt with these instances with calmness and quiet authority, at times settling them with a countdown or simply waiting for silence. She also wrote a pupils name on the board at one point as a warning.

Pupils were invited to consider the question 'how did we get here'? They were instructed to offer reasons for their views. This was contextualised with a definition of philosophy as the attempt to find truth. The teacher revisited key vocabulary for the lesson (Humanist, Theist, Agnostic, etc). She then led a discussion on myth, supported by a PowerPoint, outlining the possibility of existential as opposed to historical Truth. Pupils were then invited to consider apparent problems with the Genesis account as a piece of history. Genesis was therefore treated only as a myth. Interestingly there was no discussion juxtaposition of this understanding with a literal interpretation. Genesis was not discussed as Abrahamic but as Christian.

The teacher collated pupil ideas. The pupils generated really interesting questions such as about the possibility of animal souls, the language God spoke in, and how Genesis was recorded. Perhaps these question deserved more discussion than the teacher allowed? Pupils then ordered a series of quotes about Genesis. All of these were sympathetic or positive presentations of Genesis. This could have been balanced with a non-religious or critical quote perhaps?

In the post lesson discussion with the teacher she outlined that she has recently arrived at the school and has sought to ground learning in RE within a philosophical approach, building on the Philosophy for Children pupils had been exposed to in year 7. When asked about how she present views such as young earth creationism she responded that scientific evidence and philosophical reasoning would be applied. She adhered to a critical realist perspective about a putative ultimate reality and for her RE offers pupils the space to understand and critique humanity's attempts to discern it.

The teacher is currently undergoing her own Masters research into sexuality in schools, particularly issues relating to how homosexuality is discerned by those from Christian Pentecostal traditions.

As with the lesson observed at Grey Coats School I was struck by similarities with approaches to the subject in Scotland where, in non-denominational schools it is often taught as a philosophical approach to the main existential questions. However, I was also again interested in the extent to which the teacher's pedagogy and entire curriculum was informed by theoretical underpinnings. This offered further food for thought for me as a trainer of student teachers in RE and how I best encourage such theory informed practice in the student teachers I work with. **GN**

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„‘Diversity’ ist ein schwammiges, unklares Wort. Irgendwie soll plötzlich alles mit ‚diversity‘ zu tun haben!“, bemerkte neulich, leicht genervt, eine Kollegin.

Und in der Tat geht es einem bei dem Begriff *diversity* wie bei manch anderem Begriff, etwa bei *Gerechtigkeit*, *Wirklichkeit*, *Freiheit*, *Liebe* oder – pädagogisch sehr beliebt – *Kompetenz*: Man kann und muss lange über das reden, was man genau meint, den Begriff von benachbarten Begriffen abgrenzen, im Fall von *diversity* etwa von *Heterogenität*, *Pluralität*, *Pluralismus*, *Inklusion*, *Intersektionalität*. *Diversity* ist also in gewisser Weise erst einmal ein Such- und Arbeitsbegriff. Gerade diese Offenheit macht den Begriff produktiv und *schwammig* zugleich.

*Diversity* wird dann jedoch auf überraschende Weise auch immer sehr schnell konkret, und zwar immer dann, wenn uns die *diversity* des Anderen stört oder auch nur irritiert und verunsichert. Immer dann, wenn uns, oft sehr spontan, nach Widerspruch und Abgrenzung zu Mute ist, wenn wir plötzlich von „uns“ und den „Anderen“ sprechen, braucht es keine begriffliche Akrobatik, um zu wissen, dass es um *diversity* geht und dass es uns oft einigermaßen schwerfällt, sie zu akzeptieren, mit ihr zu leben und gelegentlich vielleicht sogar Freude an ihr zu entwickeln.

Im Zusammenspiel mit *Religion* wird *diversity* dann vollends zu einer sehr grundlegenden und manchmal auch brisanten Herausforderung. Religionen haben viel mit jahrhundertealten, gewachsenen Traditionen, mit Emotionalität und oft auch einem guten Schuss Irrationalität zu tun, sind eng mit unseren sehr persönlichen Lebensgeschichten, aber auch mit institutionellen Interessen verbunden, enthalten als dogmatische Systeme meist auch sich wechselseitig mehr oder weniger ausschließende *Wahrheitsansprüche*. Es fällt religiösen und nicht-religiösen Menschen nicht immer leicht, diese *diversity* auszuhalten und auf produktive Weise mit ihr umzugehen. In der Kombination mit *Religion* (und jeder denkt dabei zunächst an seine eigene) macht uns *diversity* (und zwar die *diversity* des Anderen) in ganz besonderer Weise angreifbar und verletzlich.

Spätestens an diesem Punkt wird deutlich, warum ein Thema wie *Religion and Diversity* in einer global vernetzten Welt gerade auch im Kontext von Bildung und Schule so wichtig ist. Wir müssen, in all unserer Diversität, lernen, mit dem Phänomen umzugehen, sozusagen READY zu werden – kognitiv, emotional, praktisch. Und wir Erwachsene, die wir solche Texte schreiben, sind dabei ebenso herausgefordert wie die Kinder und Jugendlichen, für die wir Schulen und Bildungseinrichtungen unterhalten.

Schließlich noch eine letzte Beobachtung zum Begriff *diversity*. Er kann gelegentlich nerven, wie die eingangs erwähnte Kollegin, er zeigt manchmal aber auch ein befreiendes Potential an Humor. Wenn Kollegen, Schüler, Eltern oder Vorgesetzte Ihnen in ihrem Auftreten und ihren Verhaltensweisen das nächste Mal so richtig merkwürdig und ärgerlich erscheinen, sagen Sie zu sich selbst einfach einmal „Das ist aber sehr divers ...“. Sie werden sehen, nicht selten löst sich die unangenehme Situation in einem entspannenden Lachen oder doch zumindest Lächeln auf. **PK**

**[English translation will follow soon ...]**