

# The READY-project

READ

## INSIGHTS

*Kerstin von Brömssen, Prof.*  
University West  
Sweden  
[kerstin.von-bromssen@hv.se](mailto:kerstin.von-bromssen@hv.se)

# The outline

1-7 insights

Material and method: <http://www.readyproject.eu/>

Reflective papers, travel journals, study visit papers,  
vignettes, lesson plans ...

Impressions from discussions...

# Insight 1

A deepened knowledge and understanding of the multifaceted and complex subject constructions of RE and Ethics that exist between countries, as well as between classrooms. This is due among other things to relations to the various governing bodies, the approach taken when teaching RE and the teacher her/himself.

Different views on *ontological* issues: what counts as knowledge in RE and Ethics education?

- a) Disagreement of the nature of religion – what “is” religion? In relation to the concept of culture?
- b) What is said to exist? Are there truths?
- c) Into what categories, if any, can we sort existing ‘things’? What features are essential?

# Epistemological issues

How is this knowledge on religion(s) to be acquired?

Different approaches to teaching RE:

- A confessional/denominational approach
  - A phenomenological approach (Smart 1973, 1999).
  - A human approach (Grimmit 1983, 2000)
  - An interpretative approach (Jackson 1997)
  - A critical realist approach (Wright 1993, 2004)
  - A conceptual enquiry approach (Erricker 2000,2010)
  - A lived religion approach (Ammermann 1997; Orsi 1997).
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## Some premises in our discussions:

- Religions are internally plural - Religions are diverse
- Religions are dynamic as opposed to static or fixed. Religions exist in time and space and are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by believers
- Religions are embedded in culture. Just as religion cannot be understood in isolation from its cultural manifestations, it is impossible to understand culture without considering its religious dimensions. Religion is bound to daily life.

Hecht, R. D. & Biondo, V. F. (2012) *Religion and Culture. Contemporary Practices and Perspectives*. Minneapolis, MA.: Augsburg Fortress.

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- In the same way that “race”/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and age are always factors in cultural interpretations and understanding, so too is religion.
- *Intersectionality* - the simultaneous experience of categorical and hierarchical classifications. Religion “in play” with...

Reimer Kirkham, S. & Sharma, S. (2011) von Brömssen, K. (2016)

A pressing issue: What is it that religious education is aiming to achieve educatively in public schools in diverse/plural societies?

Cf Cox question in 1983 “what is religious education essentially trying to do at this point in history” (1983: 115).

The study of religion in public schools need to be justified on educational grounds (?)

## Insight 2

An understanding that the different theoretical underpinnings of the subject play out in different ways in different nations' curricula and in classroom practice – paradoxically, the teaching can often be more alike at the classroom level.

## Reflections after study visits:

“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 is 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?”

A student from Tübingen reflecting on her visit to schools in Aberdeen, Scotland:

“It was striking for me that educators, learners, RE/RME teachers and pupils take the subject RE/RME very seriously and use it as a means to think about the big questions in life. In the curriculum, RE/RME seems to be of the same importance as the other school subjects. There didn’t seem to be the need to legitimize the subject”.

## Some examples from curricula in Austria, Scotland and Sweden

“The curriculum has played, and continues to play, a major role in forming the citizen as it institutionalizes the narratives that constitute the collective memory and shape individual’s relationships with their natural and social environments”

McEneaney & Meyer (2000)

In *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, s. 189-211).

# RE in Austria

- I. Catholic
- II. Protestant
- III. Orthodox
- IV. Free Churches
- V. Islam
- VI. Jewish
- VII. Buddhist
- VIII. Alevi
- IX. Old Catholics

# RE in Austria

In Catholic religious education, students are encouraged and, as far as possible, empowered to make their personal religious decisions in freedom and to be able to orient and shape their lives accordingly. Religious education is thus in the tradition of structured and intellectually responsible reflection of the Christian faith, without wanting to impose this belief on others.

# RE in Austria

## **Alevitic religious education in the context of school education**

He takes the different levels of religious experience of students through differentiation and individualization seriously and wants to address all students, however different their religious attitudes may be.

The religious education is denominational and has its point of orientation from the Koranic revelation and the Alevi tradition

# Scotland

## Religious and moral education

Experiences and outcomes

Learning through religious and moral education

- recognise religion as an important expression of human experience enables me to:
  - learn about and from the beliefs, values, practices and traditions of Christianity and the world religions selected for study, other traditions and viewpoints independent of religious belief
  - explore and develop knowledge and understanding of religions, recognising the place of Christianity in the Scottish context

## Sweden – Knowledge of Religion

Teaching in religion should essentially give pupils the opportunities to develop their ability to:

- analyse Christianity, other religions and other outlooks on life, as well as different interpretations and use of these,
- analyse how religions affect and are affected by conditions and events in society,
- reflect over life issues and their own and other's identity,
- reason and discuss moral issues and values based on ethical concepts and models, and
- search for information about religions and other outlooks on life and evaluate the relevance and credibility of sources.

# A reflection after a studyvisit

...in a discussion with the visitor group (the READY-group visiting Sweden) the pupils show a very intensive and sophisticated interest 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.”

## Insight 3

The whole school's ethos or school culture within which the subject is taught is important, not the least for how relationships (teacher-student, student-student) as well as student voices are given space in intercultural or crosscultural dialogues.

- Who are the students in the classroom? Every student is multidimensional and works out from several identities. Also, religious traditions are internal heterogeneous and thus, all classrooms are intercultural.
- Intercultural and inclusive classrooms or “divided” along lines such as social and economic status, abilities, languages, minorities, religions, gender, age...
- RE relevance for the students? Who decides on the relevance?

# Reflections about the Scottish education (by one of the students from Germany)

I was especially impressed by one of the students we were talking to, from the first school we went to, and she told us that in the classroom actually, there are so many different ideas in pupils' heads, and they have the chance to share them, and this is what I thought was impressive to me and something I would want to take home, as well – something I think we learn as well in Germany in our teachers' education, but actually here ... this student told me that it works.

## A reflection after a study visit in a school in Germany

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 ...

## **A reflection after a study visit in schools in Sweden**

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.

## Insight 4

Frame factors such as the RE teachers' qualifications and competences, the time given for the subject, the subject's status in the national context and how the students are evaluated plays a significant role (cf. the country studies).

Time given in Austria: 2 h/week

Time in England: 1 h/week

Time in Germany:

Time in Scotland: 1 h/week

Time in Sweden: 1 h/every second week

## Insight 5

Many contested “floating significant concepts” - education is situated and embedded in a specific national context

- Neutrality
- Diversity
- Religious literacy
- “Safe space”, “brave space”, “place of appearance”
- Truth claims

## Neutrality

The female teacher of the class just 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

## “Us” and “them”- a reflection on RE

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?”

## Insight 6

- The need for internationalization in and of teacher education, as well as close comparative studies in RE in different countries

The Scandinavian and British colleagues have, again and again, difficulties understanding what denominational or confessional Religious Education might mean 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?”

# Insight 7

How do we as educators in RE relate to international policies like “Signposts”

00Signposts Web 16X24\_web PDF TEXT FINAL.pdf

and

UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education”?

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf>

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*Thank you for listening!*

*Thank you READY-team!*

