

# NEWSLETTER

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## Welcome

Summer is coming to an end and schools all over Europe are starting again. Before we all 'go back to school' we would like to update you on the READY Project.

In spring we had our last study visits which stimulated many new thoughts and ideas. There are short reports on page 3 and you can find extensive documentation about them on our website. We also had our first national multiplier event in London (page 2). This will be followed by a German one in Tübingen in the beginning of October. You will furthermore find in this issue some ideas and texts about the role of Islam in our diverse societies and some Muslim viewpoints on it.

Finally, the READY Project does not stand by itself, but is part of the ERASMUS+ programme of the EU. You can gain a better idea of what this means by reading the following report about the eTwinning Event in Brussels on May 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **eTwinning Event Brussels**

In May, Dr Jo Pearce (UCL Institute of Education, UK), Prof Dr Peter Kliemann (Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung, Tübingen) and I (Dr David Smith, University of Aberdeen, UK) travelled to Brussels for the eTwinning Teacher Training Institutions Initiative Workshop in Brussels. eTwinning is a pan-European web-based portal which brings together different people: school-to-school; teacher-to-teacher; and student-to-student, working on joint projects in support of education and mutual understanding. eTwinning can be used at a national (in-country) level, or at an international level (Two different models for usage).

On this occasion, the two-day workshop joined

Educators from 20 different countries. Cecile Le Clercq from the European Commission opened the event, setting the scene and outlining some of the achievements of this Erasmus+ initiative. The rest of day one was spent in 'knowledge exchange', as we shared ideas and experiences around how eTwinning can be used to enrich education.

There were also presentations, not least by the READY project's Susanne Katein (Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung, Tübingen) who has used eTwinning in her Teen World project. Details of Susanne's project, in the form of a Prezi presentation, can be found on the [READY Website](#).

This was a valuable opportunity to learn how others were using eTwinning in Teacher Training Institutes across Europe and to reflect upon our own usage of eTwinning. Beyond this, it was a pleasure to reacquaint ourselves with fellow Educators whose faces were now familiar from the previous year.



**The Grand-Place in rainbow colours**

We were in Brussels at the end of Pride. This was quite befitting of the eTwinning event, for at its heart eTwinning supports diversity; a learning from others: be that within our own countries, or across them. In this sense, it reflects the spirit of the READY project itself.

# Multiplier Event

## First READY multiplier event in London

Teachers, mentors, professors, tutors and student teachers from schools and universities gathered on June 13<sup>th</sup> for the multiplier event at UCL Institute of Education (London) to collaborate on the task of considering the relations between diversity, RE and teacher education. Robust research, presentations and discussions inspired us all to think deeply about how we can creatively challenge the systems that do not reflect diversity.



### English RE multipliers at the READY event

Rousing comments and conversations peppered the day as we sought new ways to support students' mutual understanding. People left the conference motivated by the possibilities and commitment to embrace all the opportunities and challenges that diversity in the classroom and the world presents! Inspiration for new thoughts came especially from the keynotes of Dr Farid Panjwani and Dr Elisabeth Arweck.

### Religion, Diversity and Hermeneutics: the case of teaching about Islam

Dr Panjwani's talk was concerned with rethinking the predominant conception of Islam underpinning existing religious education provision, from policy to practice. In this conception, Islam is often taken to be an inert phenomenon which the students are expected to learn about. Among other ways, this is shown by the types of questions commonly found in textbooks and even in some academic publications on the subject: 'What is Islam's view on democracy?' 'What does Islam say about other religions?' 'Is Islam compatible with human rights?' Challenging this conception of Islam as a finished product, an inert tradition and an essentialised object, the talk argued for adopting a hermeneutical approach to the study of Islam.

Drawing upon the recent scholarship in religious studies and Islamic studies as well as insights from hermeneutics, and particularly the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), Dr Panjwani observed that religious texts (and traditions), like any text, do not have meanings inherent in them. Meanings emerge through the interactions of text and readers/believers. Religions are kept alive, as a work in progress, through the enmeshing of believers' agency and received interpretations, resulting in the production of new meanings. It is because of this hermeneutical process that instead of a singular Islamic position we have a range of multiple Muslim positions on almost any issue (including those raised in the questions above).

The talk proposed that a focus on social actors and meaning making will have far reaching pedagogical implications for religious education: it can help students engage with Muslim traditions from a variety of points; historical, sociological as well as theological. This will help students gain a complex and dynamic understanding of a major religion, in particular learn about the role of human agency in the making of a religious tradition (in this Islam). This, in turn, can help foster students autonomy.

### Invitation



On Friday, October 6<sup>th</sup> 2017 a national READY multiplier event will take place at the Staatliche Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung (Gymnasien) in Tübingen (Germany).

Dr Peter Schreiner, director of the Comenius Institute Münster and member of the READY consortium, will deliver a keynote on: *Religious education between 'neutrality' and 'confessional RE' – The READY project in the context of European development.*

Outcomes of the READY project will be presented as well, and colleagues from Austria, England, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland will offer workshops about the situation of Religious Education in their countries. If you are interested in receiving an invitation, please contact: [kliemann@semgym.uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:kliemann@semgym.uni-tuebingen.de).

## What else is new?

### Austrian Student Teachers visited Karlstad

As a team of 3 RE student teachers and 2 educators in RE teacher training we participated in a “field trip” to Karlstad from April 23<sup>rd</sup> to April 29<sup>th</sup> 2017 to learn more about RE in Sweden. The experience was very interesting as the approach to RE in Sweden is strikingly different to the denominational approach in Austria. We knew quite a lot about what this looks like in theory – but now we had the chance of seeing how it works in practice. After receiving detailed information on the curricula and teacher education we had the opportunity to observe lessons in different schools. The trip was as informative as it was fascinating, and it was a pleasure to visit the churches, the mosque and Karlstad University. The week in Karlstad was exciting and filled with a variety of experiences and information.



**Austrian and Swedish RE student teachers with their lecturers**

Thanks to the organizational effort of Kristian and Kerstin we returned to Vienna (and then to Carinthia) with a much better understanding of the RE system in Sweden. This week also left us with many challenging questions on what RE can and should look like – whether in a denominational or in a non-denominational (“neutral”) way.

by Annette Biderbost, Alexander Hanisch-Wolfram,  
Helga Lecher (RE student teachers, KPH Vienna)

### Hot-pants and Headscarves: The Dialectics of Identity\*

From May 28<sup>th</sup> till June 3<sup>rd</sup> five Scottish student teachers together with Graeme Nixon and David Smith visited Tübingen. During their stay they observed many RE lessons. One highlight was a RE lesson for refugees, which **Stewart Clelland** (RE Student Teacher, University of Aberdeen) reflected on:

The ‘Othering’ phenomena is something that is clearly reproduced, reinforced, and experienced by people all around the world. In classrooms made up of truly diverse groups of children, what are the challenges faced by RE teachers and how do they tackle the ‘Othering’ impulse? With this in mind we visited the Mathilde Weber Vocational School, a dual system school.

With a total of 14 pupils aged between 16 to 19 years old, all refugees from a variety of different countries, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria, the lesson we sat in on was concerned with the traditional and culturally relevant issues that surround being a good ‘Host’ and ‘Guest’. The groundwork that the teacher must have put into this group of youngsters was wonderfully inspiring. With such a diverse and traumatised group of young people, to see the friendly and respectful discourse between them was humbling. To witness a young Roma girl in hot pants laugh and joke with a young Somali girl in Hijab, dressed head to toe in black, was a beautiful and touchingly humane experience.

Never has the material resonated so clearly with myself – this was done by a focus on the human, rather than the notion of a ‘fixed identity’. A differentiation of identity was allowed, even planned for. So the genius of this lesson was the focus on truly universal concerns; we all ‘break bread’, in fact there is no more of traditional and culturally vital arena in which we communicate and transmit knowledge than over a meal. Having guests and being a good host is a fundamental shared and tradition-based cultural experience into which the student can explore their own values and the values of others. In teaching a classroom of refugee children, taking the lesson back to the ‘Home’ was a poignant and beautiful analogy – fundamentally, a child (human even) centred approach.

In the final part of the lesson the teacher introduced the story of the Good Samaritan. In an inspired touch, he worked with the Islamic version of the story. At the end of the lesson, the students, so used to being written off, lined up at the door to shake the hand of their teacher before the end of the day.

\* For the complete text, please visit our [website](#).

# Going beyond

## 300 Austrian Muslim imams condemn extremism, violence and terror

The Islamic Religious Community of Austria (IGGÖ) signed a declaration against "extremism, violence and terror" in Vienna in June which holds "that atrocities of the IS terrorists are contrary to Islam and must be condemned most severely". IGGÖ President Ibrahim Olgun said that "a religion that stands for peace cannot have fundamentalist, terrorist or radical features" and that the Islamic faith was 'polluted' by the actions of violent extremists. This rather essentialist view of Islam must be seen against the backdrop of some anti-Islamic occurrences here.

Last June, the Austrian parliament passed a controversial law banning burqas in public. A 2017 study by the British Think Tank Chatham House showed that 65% of Austrians agreed with the statement „All further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped“. Islamophobic attacks in Austria increased 65 % in 2016 compared to the previous year. A large majority of incidents involved Muslim women, with well over half taking place on public transport or other public spaces.

This shows that resentments have obviously arrived in the middle of the Austrian society. A plausible reason is seen in the prevalence of a dangerous 'half-knowledge' about Islam. Additionally, the wars in Syria and Afghanistan or recent terror attacks have enhanced existing fears and mistrust and intensified stereotypes and prejudices. They combine with the hope that with the discrimination against a group the dangers will disappear. Who knows more, however, can better distinguish between prejudices and experiences. But there are too few positive narratives and associations available.

by Heinz Ivkovits (KPH Vienna)

## Book review

Religious diversity is often discussed throughout Europe. In the past, this was characterized by relatively homogenous nation states, with only some major recognized religious traditions. However, the focus on religious diversity has increased significantly since 2000. "Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity" edited by Elisabeth Arweck is the result of a project based at the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit within the framework of the bigger "Religion and Society Programme" coordinated by Professor Linda Woodhead.

The publication contains 16 chapters divided into four parts. The first part of the book sets the context and focuses on earlier research, the second discusses results from a qualitative perspective and the third part results from a quantitative perspective. The last section of the book opens up an international outlook, which, in this case, includes views from Canada, the USA and continental Europe with a special focus on Germany and young people's attitudes to Muslims.

The book is timely and much needed for researchers and students in the field of RE, and is also relevant for religious studies, youth studies etc. One interesting result is that there is a clear gap between young people with faith and without faith in terms of their interest in religion and tolerance of religious expressions. Thus, as the authors comment, there is "a burden placed on the RE teacher". The book is especially interesting for scholars in the UK, because the data produced covers only schools there. I just wish that funds for similar research could be estimated in more European regions, thus complementing the result reported in this book. I highly recommend the book for studies and further critical discussions.

by Kerstin von Brömssen (Karlstad University)