

NEWSLETTER

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Welcome

The year is coming to an end and Christmas is near. So before we all start our holiday, we would like to give you an update on new developments in the READY project. A highlight of the past couple of months was the German multiplier event in Tübingen. You will find a report about it on page two.

Page three gives a short report about a school visit near Tübingen as well as a reflection on the study visits of the READY project. And on the last page you will find some insights on counter narratives together with an exciting book review.

But most importantly: after the multiplier event is before the multiplier event! Get excited for the next year, because our final international multiplier event will take place on April 11th & 12th in Vienna. More information and how to register can be found below.

Final international multiplier event Vienna

After almost three years of the READY project, we are happily sharing our outcomes and insights. For this purpose, we cordially invite teacher educators, researchers, multipliers and stakeholders in the field of RE to our final READY event. It will take place at the Curhaus in the heart of Vienna on April 11th & 12th, 2018.

The first day will be about plurality and diversity. Prof. emer. Dr. Siebren Miedema (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) will address the issue whether Europe still needs religious education as such. We see how Europe is becoming more secular and religiously diverse and that old organizational structures are losing their plausibility. In working groups, we want to discuss the question: What does that mean for us?

To get a live impression of this new reality, we will explore the city of Vienna according to the motto "Vienna – Lived Diversity as Chance and Challenge", following trails of Protestant, Orthodox, Islamic and Jewish heritage and meet representatives from these religions and cultures. Of course, we will have plenty of time for conversation and exchange as well.



St. Stephen's Cathedral (Vienna) opposite our conference venue

The second day will focus on the READY project. Prof. Dr. Kerstin von Brömssen (University West Trollhättan, Sweden) will present the key insights; the multimedia outputs will be on display as well. Workshops on RE in this new market of possibilities will lead to final theses about what we need and what we have got for sustainable RE that empowers young people to live in religiously and culturally diverse societies.

We are very excited that the KPH Vienna will be our host and look forward to these inspiring and informative days.

Are you interested in joining? For further information and registration (starting December 15th) please visit www.readyproject.eu or www.kphvie.ac.at/ready.

Sharing insights

A report from the multiplier event Tübingen

Involvement in the READY project has been interesting indeed. Every project has its various phases, and we are moving from a period of learning and gathering data with an open mind, towards a period of analyzing the material and communicating what has been learnt. The national multiplier event in Tübingen was such an event. School teachers, teacher educators and researchers were present.



Researchers, teachers and multipliers talking about READY

The tone was set through a keynote by Dr Peter Schreiner, and glimpses were given of the various results of the project during the day, which ended in an open, engaging discussion. I might have been hesitant before, but as the day progressed it gradually became clear that the READY project indeed has something to contribute. Various countries might have different approaches to religion(s) and ethics, and though the topic might in some cases seem neglected, it often lies at the core of school. For it is about, how to educate emphatic, responsible citizens that are able to reflect on what constitutes a good life and actively make decisions in order to move towards it.

Every nation has its history, never in isolation from neighbours or the world, but always unique. This must be acknowledged. However, it feels like the world is growing smaller day by day. People are literally able to communicate across borders at the speed of light, and are moving about more than ever before, sometimes by choice; sometimes out of necessity. The challenges of globalization and the Anthropocene are posed to each and every country. Though the capacities to respond to it might vary, all are affected. Every form of education everywhere needs to consider it – but does not need to do this alone. Since the challenges we face, too, are global, we can work together towards an education which would realize the goal, mentioned above.

When travelling, I often take comfort when seeing children walking with backpacks in the early morning. It is a sight that reminds me that wherever children are walking to school, they are striving to learn to live a good life and are becoming an active part of society.

by Kristian Niemi (Karlstad University)

RE between Commitment and Neutrality



The keynote of the German multiplier event introduced basic information about RE in Europe and some controversies in the European discourse on

RE. To highlight some aspects:

- The issue of “commitment and neutrality” is an educational problem especially in pedagogical settings aimed at children and young adult's decisions. Perspectives of the discussion relate to schools, pupils as well as to teachers and parents. It is not an issue dedicated exclusively to RE but an element of responsible schooling.
- Terms such as “commitment”, “objectivity”, “neutrality” or “impartiality” are difficult to grasp. A teacher in a European project defined “neutral” as being open and full of respect for the commitment of others.
- In the German contexts three principles of citizenship education also count for RE: *no indoctrination*, *controversial debates on controversial issues*, and *taking account of pupil's perspectives and their way of dealing with issues*.
- Neutrality refers to the political sphere, impartiality is linked to a personal view of the teacher and objectivity refers to the validity and appropriateness of knowledge.
- Challenges for RE include a trend of marginalisation due to education policy decisions moving toward economic criteria in education. Also a globalisation of religion should have consequences for RE because if the shape of religion is changing RE cannot stay as it is.

by Peter Schreiner (Comenius Institute, Münster)

What else is new?

School visit to the Firstwald-Gymnasium

From Oct. 3rd until Oct. 6th, the 6th Transnational Partner Meeting of the READY project took place in Tübingen. It was a time of busy planning and exchange on different elements of the project, e.g. website, publication, multiplier events. Besides the planning and the very fruitful multiplier event on October 6th, the time was used for a school visit. The READY consortium got an insight into RE lessons and school life at a Protestant high school. The Firstwald-Gymnasium is located close to Tübingen in a town called Mössingen. The former boarding school, founded in 1965, still has some pupils living on campus, but is now mainly a regular whole-day school.

The school has many extra-curricular classes (carpentry, media, etc.), a beautiful room of silence, and much more. But the READY consortium was most impressed with the positive atmosphere at the school.



The READY team in the room of silence at the Firstwald-Gymnasium

It was reflected in the way the pupils interacted with each other not only in the breaks and at the cafeteria, but especially during RE lessons. The term "safe space" became a real experience with pupils sharing intimate information about their personal views. This visit provoked many new thoughts and furthered the discussion on the best way to handle diversity.

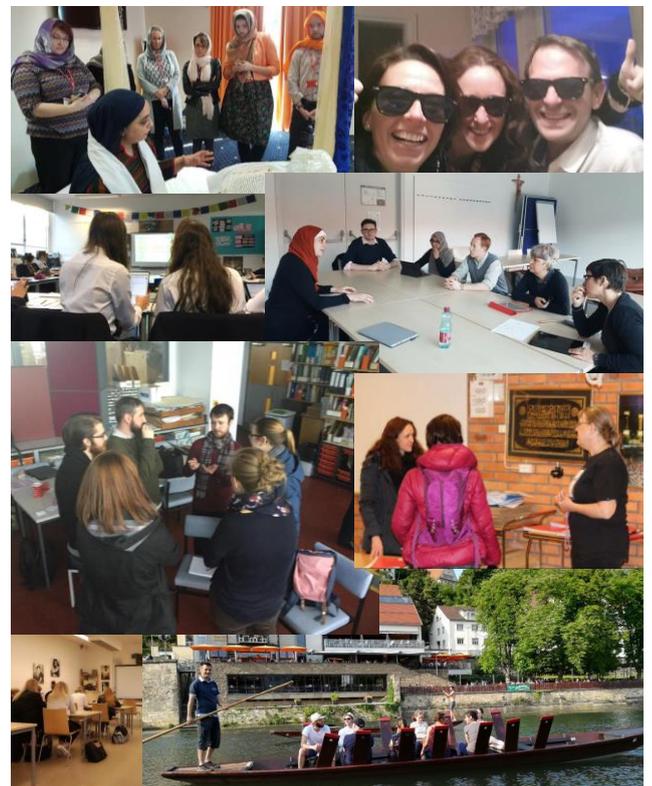
The READY study visits

At the heart of the READY project lies the study visits of the student teachers. To put it into numbers: 5 places, 22 student teachers, 13 teacher educators resp. experts, more than 8,000 km travelled and more than 15 schools visited.

But there is more to it than just numbers. Now that the study visits are over, we are starting to evaluate them and reflect on the outcomes.

Some first thoughts: Study visits are more than just acquiring knowledge about a different system of Religious Education. They are about meeting people, getting into discussions, taking in the atmosphere of a different (school) culture and hopefully obtaining a reflective view on the Self as well as the Other. And even though the visits are planned out and a specific objective (i.e. diversity in RE) is given, the results can never be planned. For example, the Austrian student teachers were especially surprised by the strict classroom management as well as the emphasis on teaching for the test in England; a Scottish student teacher was moved by the way a Catholic RE teacher from Tübingen had built a trusting relationship with a class full of refugees and German student teachers were inspired by the concept of "Philosophy with and for Children" that READY partner Graeme Nixon (Aberdeen) presented.

If you want to know more about conclusions the student teachers drew from the study visits, then look at their reports on www.readyproject.eu/resources/study-visits.



Going beyond

New narratives about migration and flight

Narratives have a normative effect on those who listen to them and are memorised in what seems plausible. Their meaning for society is political by constituting community, establishing an order and mobilizing the members of a group to work together. A narrative says: "Here you hear who we are".

Extremist narratives are effective because of their simplicity, their use of scapegoating and their emotional appeals to fear, anger, shame and honour. Extremists are inhabiting the spaces where young people consume and share information, socialise and are socialised: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Reddit, Snapchat, Askfm or Kik.

In everyday language, migrant workers and foreigners have often become refugees who then mutate into Muslims in perception, or directly into Islamists or even terrorists. In order to counteract this, we need other, sense-oriented narratives, stories, visions and images about migration and flight that focus on what we are 'for' rather than 'against' in the form of positive stories about social values, tolerance, openness, freedom and democracy. And we need narratives that dispute a commonly held belief or truth.

A research project of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Vienna with participation of the KPH Vienna aims at developing such new narratives.

by Heinz Ivkovits (KPH Vienna)

Book review

The anthology "Assessment in Ethics Education. A Case of National Tests in Religious Education" (Springer 2017) assembles professional articles of authors working in the university context.

The mixture of authors is interesting, because in addition to their research on topics of Religious Education, some of them have worked with reference to the National Agency of Education (Sweden) or have experience as teachers. The editor, Olof Franck, is an associate professor of philosophy of religion and senior lecturer in the subject matter of education in social studies at the University of Gothenburg. Furthermore, several authors of this book are involved in the current project, "What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School", and present some research results of this project in their articles (cf. p. 5).

The integrating background of the articles is provided by the following question: whether the development of manifold assessment procedures for ensuring educational quality "is opposed to or in conflict with a focus on existential and relational purposes in ethics and education" (p. 1). According to this basic question, some articles address the problem of how to develop valid and reliable tests in a subject whose content includes, at least partially, profound existential questions (cf. p. 4). Other articles are related to the domain of a theory of assessment. The book intends to mirror questions and themes in this field of work with relevance to both researchers and teachers in the Swedish as well as international context.

On the whole the different articles deal with the question of ethical competencies and their measurability in a highly differentiated manner. What is remarkable, however, is that within the entire book, a systematically developed basic conception of ethics as a branch of philosophy cannot be found and there is also no discussion of how a philosophically founded school-subject of ethics could be structured.

by Christof Schilling
(Staatl. Seminar für Lehrerbildung Tübingen)