
Are you READY?

DIVERSITY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ACROSS EUROPE – THE STORY OF THE READY PROJECT

EDITED BY PETER SCHREINER

in cooperation with Kerstin von Brömssen, Martin Fischer, Heinz Ivkovits, Peter Kliemann, Kristian Niemi, Graeme Nixon, Janika Olschewski, Jo Pearce, Jane Savill, Christof Schilling, David Smith, Alexis Stones, Inge Strass



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Peter Schreiner (ed.)

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This book gives highly valuable and profound insights into the place of Religious Education in different classrooms in Europe. READY, Religious Education and Diversity, is unique as an innovative exchange project of teacher students and teacher educators in Religious Education sponsored by Erasmus+. Mutual exchange visits in the participating countries create opportunities for crucial debates about approaches to Religious Education, its underlying theory and practical experiences of teaching and learning. Narratives from educational practice in five different countries actualise the ongoing debates on Religious Education models, religion in schools ethos and mission, school culture, objectives in Religious Education, religious literacy, Religious Education and truth claims, and Religious Education in relation to European education policy. The exchange method links between informed discussions and real classroom situations, and also theoretical and practical expertise. In the project students, teachers, teacher students and teacher educators are linked together, and so also curricula-studies and contextual conditions are issues of exchange and debate.

Visits by travelling are supplemented by exploring and using the exchange platform eTwinning of the European Commission, so far mostly used to link classrooms in schools, and now through READY also used to link groups of religion teacher education in

different countries. READY is a pilot project for exchange and documentation of teacher education, and new guidelines for this online communication have been developed as part of the project. Reports, newsletters, teaching examples and academic contributions are published on this platform for common use. DVDs with modules on religion and diversity are also made available from the READY project.

The book gives insights into teacher students reasoning when visiting Religious Education set in other models than their own. The Austrian and German confessional models meet with the Swedish, English and Scottish diverse multireligious models and certain preunderstandings are revealed and discussed vividly. The observations are studied and reflected upon in theoretical chapters from the perspectives of education, didactics, theology and religious studies by experienced teacher educators.

A quote from one of the members in the READY team:

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?

This shows that educators from different contexts value educational practice similarly. They distinguish the desirable from what is not needed. This might show a common grammar for Religious Education across models and theories. Teaching and learning strategies – or good education – seem to be rather similar. It raises the question on how far practice is influenced by the diverse reality of the pupils. And: why desire to converge Religious Education

models if they are working well under their historical and contextual conditions?

Five countries took part, this is of course not the whole of Europe, and no Southern European country is included. Nevertheless, global trends and Europeanization in education mark education all over Europe and make the book highly relevant.

So reader: READY – go!

*Prof. Dr Heid Leganger-Krogstad
Oslo in September 2018*

Why READY was started

Religious Education (RE) as a discrete subject in public schools in Europe is designed and delivered in many ways. Models exist where religious communities have the majority say, in other contexts cooperation happens between the state and religious communities and in other regions the state alone is responsible for RE. Different models are underpinned by different aims and purposes although the overlapping area is not small. Each country's respective situation and form of organization differ significantly for a variety of reasons. Despite the different contexts, an increasingly widespread discussion about the future of RE takes place. Existing models are questioned and challenged due to trends such as secularization, individualisation and pluralisation. These discussions should be continued within, and connected to the realm of teacher education and training. Future RE teachers could benefit for their professional development by becoming more familiar with the situation of RE (and related subjects) in other European countries. This would enable them to contribute to a shared European dialogue where commonalities and differences can be transformed to European perspectives.

In this context, the purpose of READY is to organize a structured dialogue, exchange and cooperation

among stakeholders in teacher education in the field of Religious Education across Europe. A purpose of this exchange and dialogue is the production of a range of intellectual outputs which are intended to offer motivation and support for colleagues across Europe who work in this field.

READY AS A PROJECT IN THE FRAME OF ERASMUS+

READY stands for Religious Education and Diversity. Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020).

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014–2020. Education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes, the key challenges that Europe will be facing until the end of the decade and to support the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion. (Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2018, 5)

The ambitious aims of the EU programme need concreted actions and projects that work on these overall aims. The link to education demonstrates

that education can make a difference in the sense of promoting hope for transformation and contributing to the common good.

Education, training, youth work and sport are key to promote common European values, foster social integration, enhance intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community, and to prevent violent radicalisation. Erasmus+ is an effective instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants. (ibid., 5)

The trust in education that is implicit in this programmatic statement needs to be reflected and inherited in concrete pedagogical programmes in formal and non-formal education.

In the view of the organizing and participating institutions of READY, the following mentioned aims in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide are closely linked to the purpose of Religious Education in schools and therefore also a guideline for the planned activities and outcomes.

- + Promoting common European values
- + Fostering social integration
- + Enhancing intercultural understanding

In particular, enhancing intercultural understanding is closely linked to aims of a concept of Religious Education that has a focus on diversity as a specific marker of European societies.

The Erasmus+ frame of the READY project is *Key Action 2 – Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices*. This Key Action promotes the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels.

Through READY we could contribute to the following areas that are supported by Key Action 2:

- + *Transnational Strategic Partnerships* in the field of training Religious Education teachers across Europe
- + *Knowledge Alliances between higher education institutions and enterprises which aim to foster innovation, knowledge exchange and/or multi-disciplinary teaching and learning* in the field of Religious Education.
- + *Capacity-building in the field of higher education* by bringing together RE teacher education departments from different European contexts.
- + *eTwinning played a decisive role in our project* for exchanging perspectives and documents as well as for dialogue among the different groups of student teachers and teacher educators.

The activities and outcomes of READY contribute directly to the following targets of Key Action 2:

- + *Increased level of digital competence* by using digital tools and social networks
- + *Greater understanding and responsiveness to social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity* with a special emphasis on religions and worldviews and by organizing study visits and exchanges
- + *Better understanding of practices, policies and systems in education, training across countries* by bringing together teacher education departments and institutes especially in the field of Religious Education and Ethics
- + *Increased opportunities for professional development of student teachers and teacher educators* through national and international multiplier events, dissemination of READY activities in the different national contexts and

developing intellectual outputs as the essence of the READY project.

READY project, and an article that puts READY in the wider context of Religious Education in Europe.

WHY THIS PUBLICATION?

The publication – as an intellectual output of the project – summarizes the main activities and outcomes of the READY project and presents issues, viewpoints and insights. The publication is offered to inform teacher educators, RE student teachers, RE teachers and other stakeholders of RE as well as politicians about main activities and products of the READY project. Readers may want to connect the presented material and insights to their own contexts and their concern for a value oriented school education where religions and non-religious world-views have a place and a space in an inclusive concept of education.

HOW IS THE BOOK ORGANIZED?

Chapter 1 provides basics and starting points for the READY project. It includes a reflective glossary of key project terms, a general introduction of the

Chapter 2 presents the wide range of elements and activities which sit under the umbrella of READY. During the course of the project a number of issues, viewpoints and insights came up that sharpened different “lenses” in the debate about Religious Education in Diversity. These are presented in **Chapter 3**.

Finally **Chapter 4** promotes insights and conclusions via the rich input of academic speakers at the international multiplier event in Vienna (April 2018) and the national multiplier event in London in June 2017. Especially insights of the project are presented in the contribution.

The publication complements the project website (www.readyproject.eu) as well as the other publications and outcomes of the project.¹

The term ‘intellectual output’ is common in the Erasmus+ context and identifies products and key results that come out of a specific project. ■

¹ Chapters explicitly written for this publication are dedicated to their authors, in between texts and other pieces are written by the editor or stem from the members of the READY consortium.

