

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

What impact has READY had on my practice as an RE teacher?

*Final Statements of student teachers involved
in the READY project*

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Austria

READY project has sharpened my personal view on diversity wherever I come into contact with diversity and variety, with strangers or things that are 'different'. Since joining this great project, I now know that also religious education is subject to the principle of diversity. 😊 Diversity invigorates our everyday life and makes life extraordinary and 'colourful'. It's interesting and amazing to see the world from different perspectives - or even to try it. Since READY, I have also focused more on diversity in religious education. Especially a religious cooperation (for example KoKoRU [Confessional-Cooperative RE]) I now see as an opportunity and enrichment (not only) for the young people. On this occasion, I would like to thank once again that I was allowed to be part of this project. Analyses, discussions with the partner institutions and mutual visits have made me even more open minded for an appropriate handling of diversity.

Annette Biderbost, Carinthia

What in the end was the most striking experience in the context of the READY project was that I reflected my own approach to Religious Education in a very intensive way. Knowing about other approaches, about other organisation models of RE raised the question whether our way of teaching RE was "right" or "appropriate" in the context of a plural and to a growing extent secular society. In this regard it was also of great importance to see how such different approaches work in practice, in my case how RE works in Sweden. And all discussions about different ways of thinking and practising RE in which I took part were led in mutual respect, whatever one's personal approach.

The core of my own concept of RE has not changed during the project, but many reflections and observations have influenced how I put this concept into "classroom reality" - being aware that there would be also many other legitimate and well-founded concepts and I should know why I have chosen mine.

Alexander Hanisch-Wolfram, Carinthia

As part of the READY project, I had the opportunity to get to know religious education in England and to exchange ideas with local teachers and students. After this trip, I was firmly convinced that "our" way of teaching religion, the denominational RE, would be the only proper way of teaching religion and that all the other reflections and approaches would be completely irrelevant to me. But then I taught at a school where students belonged to many different religions, who either had little or no religious experience. The requirements were very different, so I had to approach many topics quite differently. Here, the experiences from England helped me a lot. Again, and again I have considered, how would denominational RE approach this topic and how would the religious approach look like? But I also found that the 12- to 14-year-old students at this school were significantly more interested in topics that were viewed from the perspective of different religions and ideologies. On the other hand, they largely rejected denominational themes at this age. The exchange and cooperation were therefore always beneficial for me. The demands on European schools are changing along with social developments. That is why RE teachers all over Europe are faced with completely new tasks.

Nina Schaar, Vienna

Interesting for me was to get to know the different types of religious education, also that systems that look like the same from the outside, are very different from the self-understanding and the intention. Through this getting to know each other, I have come to appreciate the possibilities offered by "our kind" of religious education: knowledge transfer in combination with the opportunity to experience religion and spirituality.

Roswitha Slavik, Vienna

England

The READY project has made me more aware of the different approaches to teaching Religious Education and the need to appreciate the diverse range of religions and values held within the classroom. Activities are designed to incorporate discussion of and reflection on a broader range of religious attitudes and encourage students to argue from perspectives other than their own.

Michael Dove, London

One thing I learnt was perhaps teaching religion from an insider's perspective isn't an issue if it means that pupils can grasp some form of understanding of why people believe and its influences on them. I've found that when teaching RE, especially Islam, I share deeper and personal experiences. At first I feared pupils from none and other faiths may feel detached, but it made for greater acceptance of each other, as well as an understanding that the classroom is a safe space for them to express their religious and non-religious identities. Now I can't seem to get rid of them during my breaks because they're so keen!

This is what I would describe as my biggest achievement in my career so far. The pupils are engaged, motivated and challenged, and never once have I heard - "Why do we have to do RE?" in an exasperated tone. We have an even larger cohort next year and I hope to inspire the same love for RE as I have done so far.

Siddiqa Khatun, London

Germany

READY has provided me with the opportunity to experience other ways of teaching RE. During our visit in Scotland I was inspired by new ways and approaches to engage students in deep discussions. (for example philosophy with children) I ended up adopting it to my own practice, where I have found it to be an effective way to support students that are very shy to talk openly in the classroom. The READY project has also made me think about my role as an RE teacher. It was interesting to learn that there are different ways to become an RME/RMPS teacher in Scotland. In contrast to Germany, where every RE teacher has studied either catholic or protestant theology, in Scotland it is also possible to study e.g. only philosophy. In this sense they might offer a more 'neutral' perspective on different religions but value every religion as an own entity. However, based on my short experience being an RE teacher I wonder if neutrality might allow for plurality, but does it really encourage it? In addition to this, the religious backgrounds of the RE students are also not known to the teacher. I had expected to find a lively discussion from various religious backgrounds in the Scottish RE lessons, however, the discussions about religious topics were - again - very "neutral". From my point of view you need to talk about one's religious background to form a religious identity, even if this is opposed to the way that I am teaching. So I think I will deal with this question of neutrality again and again while teaching students.

Lydia Kränzle nee Hüsemann, Tübingen

The subject RE offers students profitable experiences like no other. However, teaching RE is not easy! READY offered me the opportunity to meet young RE teachers from Scotland, who are facing the same challenge as we do in Germany. Through the exchange with fellow teachers I've been encouraged for my work. It is good to know that there are motivated RE teachers in many European countries. Together we can open students a space to think about the big questions of life.

Gabi Weber, Tübingen

Scotland

READY has provided me with the opportunity to share good practice and approaches to learning with a wider scope. Discussing and observing the effectiveness of teaching in a very different context to that which I have been used to in Scotland has made me far more open to trying new strategies in my own practice. I was so intrigued by one activity used for group discussion in a German classroom, that I ended up adopting it into my own practice, where I have found it to be an effective way of engaging with my learners.

Matthew Carle, Aberdeen

It was through my experiences with the READY project that I started to come to terms with my role as an R.E. teacher. By being given the opportunity to engage in real life classroom observations, I started to gain a real sense that simple trust and respect were of vital importance in teaching. Clearly, if a student doesn't respect and trust his or her teacher or if a teacher isn't respectful of students or their families and backgrounds, the learning environment won't be nurturing and the teacher's classroom management strategies won't be effective. Essentialist views regarding Identity are fundamentally at odds with these notions of respect and trust, and fundamentally at odds with the actual dialectics of Identity found in my classroom; such views are in no way respectful of students or their families as unique individuals. I have continuously found that reductive and essentialist perspectives eventually develop into a lack of trust and respect which will cause children to feel unsafe and uncomfortable, which may lead to children having behavioural problems and an overall sense of 'Othering'. Now almost a year on since my involvement with the READY project, my professional practise and lesson planning includes a great deal of 'active' learning as I have seen first hand how this can help trust and respect to develop and flourish in the classroom. Furthermore, I try to remember at all times that all interactions with students are opportunities to strengthen the teacher-student relationship. The teacher-student relationship is vitally important, but the relationships children have with other children equally impact trust and respect in the classroom. Including 'active tasks' such as 'role play' in lesson planning is a way to help pupils develop trust in me and their classmates. At every opportunity I try to ensure I get to know the pupils and their families. My students come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures; just as there is no such thing as fixed-ability, there is no such thing as a fixed-identity.

Stewart Clelland, Dundee

Being involved in READY has been a great experience for me and opened up so many new opportunities. Through my involvement with the READY project I have become a British Council Schools Ambassador helping train and support staff on using eTwinning and British Council connecting schools and running CPD events in Moray & Highland. I have over the past year continued my European partnerships with my pupils through eTwinning projects, one called "tell me about your religion" with partner schools in Spain, Romania & Turkey where the pupils shared religious experience and traditions in their country and their own personal experience of religion. My second project was with our own READY teacher partner Suzi Katein with her school in Germany called "Stand up for your Rights" which our pupils exchanged their thoughts and opinions on Human Rights via email and videos. Suzi & I have agreed to continue our eTwinning links with our new classes in the new term and will be discussing project planning over the summer via Skype / email. I also taught the joint lesson that Lydia & I worked on together in Tübingen which was to my National 5 class on UK, German & European law on Assisted Dying. These projects have both received excellent feedback from the pupils involved and also been supported by schools management team who are keen for me to continue with this with further classes. At the recent CPD event I ran on an Introduction to British Council & eTwinning our Moray Q10 attended and as a result he has asked me to present to the Head Teachers in Moray at one of their next meetings in order to promote International Education in Moray schools. So I guess you could say

that READY taken me on an exciting journey which I hope to continue with my pupils. Thank you for giving me this opportunity!

Marilyn Hamilton, Nairn

Sweden

READY has helped me to think about Religious Education and different ways of teaching. This includes examples of different paths for learning and how religious phenomenon may be introduced in multicultural groups of pupils. Moreover, the experiences have really made me reflect upon my own cultural - as well as Religious Educational - frame.

Tilda Aronsson, Karlstad

The READY project impacted my future practice in terms of showing how different countries teach about religions, where content as well as didactics differ. Most apparent was that teacher education differs in England as compared to Sweden, as does the way we teach religious education to our pupils. For example: in Sweden RE is compulsory, but non-denominational. In England, as I understood it, parents can give permission for their child to not attend religious education. Education in RE is non-compulsory but all pupils must attend final exams. In Austria religious education is denominational. The project was a great example of how different our school systems are. During our visit in London we also got to challenge our view on the way we can teach RE. For instance, we visited the national gallery where we got a task to come up with ideas about how we can involve art in the religious education. This task gave me ideas about how I can teach religious education together with other school subjects.

Gabriella Dahlhjelm, Karlstad

READY has contributed with an understanding of Religious Education in Europe, but also in the Swedish school system. Discussions with the others students have developed my knowledge about the subject of religion in the Swedish curriculum. The school visits in London gave me new knowledge about different ways of teaching RE and now I know more about subject didactics than I knew before READY, which is valuable for my future profession.

Lisa Lannerås, Karlstad