

# NEWSLETTER

Issue 7 > March 2018

## Welcome

We have reached the final stage! Our last international conference is happening in April and all intellectual outputs are being finalized. So, with mixed feelings we realize that the READY project is slowly coming to an end. Therefore, we want to give you an overview of what we have achieved so far and what you can expect the next couple of months.

Heinz Ivkowitz from Vienna will start by taking you into the discussion about handling diversity in the RE classroom. You will then find brief summaries about many of our intellectual outputs on the next pages. Please feel invited to learn more about them at our multiplier event in Vienna. You find out how to apply on page 3.

On the last page two projects on religious diversity in the RE classroom are presented, in which members of the READY team are involved. We hope you enjoy reading the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of our newsletter!

### We and the Others

As part of the READY project, various methods of handling increasing diversity in the RE classroom are discussed by the project team. In this context Heinz Ivkovits (KPH Vienna/Krems) raised the question **'RE as a safe or brave space?'**

In the current tough and sometimes frightening public discourse, many people feel misunderstood and left alone in terms of opinions and beliefs. They seek allies who share their views and the "We" increasingly retreat into safe bubbles. Conflicting positions that could injure or irritate are excluded. Those who think or act differently are preventively packed into an imaginary box called "The Others".

But who is "We" and "the Others", e.g. within a school, a classroom or a community? Who represents the "norm", the "status quo"? What does this mean for learning and teaching?

The Council of Europe suggests the "provision of a safe learning space to encourage expression without fear of being judged or held to ridicule." Should RE or Ethics be such 'safe spaces' for the exploration of diversity to show sensitivity to the beliefs and values of the individual students?

Whenever controversial issues are discussed and different truth claims are made, students need to understand that the principle of freedom of religion or belief gives individuals the right to hold a particular belief, even if others do not share it. This requires the recognition of "internal diversity" and the personal character of religious and non-religious world views. Discussing differences at eye level and in mutual respect makes us aware that knowledge is generated only by open and free exchange of opinions, views and positions, even if they are uncomfortable and unpleasant.

Thus, encounters and discourse in educational institutions (and probably in RE classrooms) need a mixture of rooms: safe spaces in which one can "arrive" in a circle of like-minded people, ask questions and receive answers and open "brave" spaces in which authentically introduced perspectives are clarified and classified, where everyone has the freedom to think differently, to adopt different positions, but also to live up to the call to endure ambivalences and inadequacies against the pressure of uniformity and unambiguity.

# Intellectual Outputs

The intellectual outputs lie at the heart of the READY project. Besides the three guidelines (see newsletter no. 4), four more products are in the process of being finalized. In the following we want to give insight into the case studies (IO3), documentation (IO5) and the print publication (IO7).

## Case Studies (IO3)

The case studies examine how RE and RE teacher education is organised in the READY partner-countries. Next to a chart that compares key data on RE of the five different countries, certain issues are looked at in more detail for each country. The country reports are divided in 5 chapters: 1. Religious landscape, 2. Religious Education (RE), 3. How RE teacher education is organized, 4. Current developments and 5. Challenges and perspectives. Exemplary paths toward becoming an RE teacher are shown by the participating READY organisation's programmes.

With this, obvious differences like different courses as prerequisites for becoming a teacher (theology vs. religious studies) and the amount of training that is required can be seen. Beyond that also the cultural background and historically evolved decisions for a certain shaping of RE are described. This opens up the opportunity to see similarities as well as differences and to learn from the experiences outside each respective country.

## Documentation (IO 5)

The intellectual output "Documentation" is mainly the responsibility of the Swedish READY partner. **Kerstin von Brömssen** took on the task to sort through the material collected over the last three years. Here are some reflections she has made on them:

In much of the material that we have produced and gathered in the READY-project, there seems to be an assumption that most (if not all?) students in our classrooms hold a religious view and are aware of the religious traditions to which they might belong. Research in Sweden as well as in Britain (Day 2011) show that this is not necessarily the case. Far from it actually, if we don't consider secularism as a religious belief (which we might though).



Abby Day claims that her research reveals that young people believe in social values, people and social institutions that they trust, or want to trust. Fewer young people choose to call themselves religious and together with an individualistic and/or autonomously colored religiosity, or no religiosity at all, a reflexive and critically reviewing attitude towards religion seems to be growing in different parts of Europe, not the least in the Nordic countries. This raises of course questions on how to get students to be invested in Religious Education. I have found the concept of investment in the literature on second language learning and discussions on how to make students understand that they have to invest in learning when studying a language. It's hard work really to be a good speaker in a foreign language. The same can be said in many ways of all studies, even if it doesn't immediately present itself that clearly to young people. So, why should students invest in Religious Education? These are questions which keep chasing me when working through our material.

## Print publication (IO 7)

The print publication will highlight key findings of READY on future concepts of RE teacher education and forms of RE in school. Therefore, it documents the main ideas and outcomes of the project.

It includes the products of the other intellectual outputs, i.e. guidelines for online communication and the study visits, case studies on RE teacher education in different European countries etc. The print publication will also include resources for further activities in teacher training and provide examples for teaching about "religion and diversity."

## What else is new?

### Come and join us in Vienna

After three years, the READY project will conclude with a final major conference in Vienna. It will take place on April 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The programme includes lectures, workshops and impulses on the question of plurality and diversity in Europe as well as the presentation of project findings and conclusions regarding RE and religion in school life. The event offers an excellent opportunity for exchange and networking with educational and religious education experts from our partner countries.

We also invite you to city walks in the footsteps of the Reformation and the Orthodox, Jewish and Islamic Vienna as well as to an evening programme with music from different cultures and religions.

The exact programme and the registration form can be found at [www.kphvie.ac.at/ready](http://www.kphvie.ac.at/ready)

**Register now!**

### READY website

We've renovated! Come and have a fresh look at the READY website!

- The slide show offers new views on Scotland, Switzerland, and Austria. There are also some interesting takes on India and Greece
- *Resources > RE across the world* opens perspectives on further countries
- Under *Resources > Reflective papers* you will find conceptual papers for discussion and debate
- Under *Resources > Lesson plans & more* there are READY-made classroom ideas from the different partner countries
- Under *Resources > Travel journals* reports and reflections on the different READY study visits are collected
- Documentation on the conferences in London, Tübingen, and Vienna are collected under *Resources > Material from READY Multiplier Events*
- *Resources > links* offers inspiration for those who have found interest in European and International cooperation

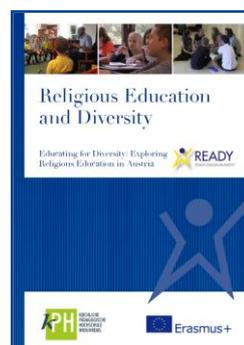
- *Galleries*: Here, you can have a look at our photos and see moments from the READY visits and conferences for yourself
- *Participants*: A list of the READY partner institutions and their faculty involved with the project are introduced here.
- *YouTube*: Our READY channel is inspiring and entertaining, with short videos from the different partner countries (see the symbol at the top right)

### READY DVDs

In the context of the READY project, we are also producing three DVDs reflecting RE lessons in different European countries. Two of them are now "READY":

The Staatliche Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung (Gymnasien) Tübingen has developed and compiled various examples from religious education, which can be used to discuss diverse approaches and challenges of the topic of CREATION in the training and further education of teachers of religion and ethics.

The Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Vienna/Krems developed a DVD with two teaching examples:



Video 1: "That really touched me" - Between Theory and Authentic Encounters

Video 2: "See you in Heaven" - Religion and the Hereafter

The lesson sequences have been devised and held by two students of the Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Vienna/Krems and can be used to discuss diverse approaches and challenges of denominational Religious Education in the training and further education of teachers of religion.

The DVDs do not claim to show exemplary lessons. Copying the video material is not permitted. The recordings may only be shown within the framework of teacher education and only with the consent of the READY consortium.

# Going beyond

## Dialogical-confessional RE (dk:RU) in Austria evaluated

The results can be outlined as follows:

### Challenges

How can binding arrangements be made if teachers are employed at many schools so that no common meeting and preparation times can be found? How can the necessary trust for team teaching between the participants be built up? How can an increase in preparatory effort be achieved? How can the deepening of one's own denominational affiliation be consolidated in a mixed denominational group?

### Insights

Pupils are largely for it, mainly in form of team-teaching with teachers from all denominations involved, which fosters authenticity and reduces prejudices. It may also have positive effects on the class structure. Some worry about not being respected in their own denomination by a teacher of another denomination and that content gets mixed up. In any case, the decisive factors seem to be the quality of communication and the teachers' agreements.

### Conclusions

The project brings significant added value to religious learning. The expansion towards other religions (Islam) is desirable, an improvement of organizational and communication aspects is necessary. Targeted support measures for personnel and quality development have to be introduced, a new didactic concept with the synopsis of curricula and teaching materials is needed, together with the clear commitment of all concerned with RE to participate in dk:RU (teachers, parents, school management, pupils).

Heinz Ivkovits (KPH Vienna/Krems)

## Schools and the Sanitizing of Religion

Last September, David Smith, Graeme Nixon and Jo Pearce, all part of the READY team, presented a paper at the British Educational Research Association conference. Their thesis, based on a national UK dataset of over 500 RE teachers was that bad (violent) religion is not false religion, in spite of such representation by teachers, politicians and the media. This definitional turn is seen in wider contemporary cultural discourse in which 'true' religion, being essentially loving and peaceful, is distinguished from 'false' religion, which constitutes a harmful and dangerous distortion.

The national dataset showed that many RE teachers similarly sanitize religion of wrongdoing. For example, 37% of respondents, when asked if religion is dangerous replied 'Not at all', and when asked if religions should be taught in a positive way 59% responded 'Absolutely'.

Jo, David and Graeme argue that to be religiously literate and to develop critical awareness is to understand the complexities of religion – to appreciate that ISIL is an expression of Islam; that violent Christian anti-abortionist direct-action is an expression of Christianity etc. Although not 'false' expressions, they do represent bad forms of religion. An essentialised and sanitized form of RE will meet neither the extrinsic (knowledge) or intrinsic (tolerance) aims. RE can only enable and encourage religious literacy if religions are presented as complex social phenomena. This cannot be predicated upon a conceptualization of harmful religion as 'false' religion.

In March 2018 they are presenting their finding at the European Academy of Religion's conference in Bologna

<https://www.europeanacademyofreligion.org/>.

Graeme Nixon (University of Aberdeen)