INPUTS INTO TEACHING AND DIDACTIC PROJECTS WITH RELIGIOUS THEMES AS A SERVICE TO CURRENT SCHOOL AND TO TEACHERS OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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V praxi se objevují stereotypy mezi lidmi ze školního prostředí u témat vztahujících se k náboženství. Existují dostatečné základy pro naše úsilí jak zlepšit práci ve škole. Zahrnuje to osobnost dítěte, jeho původ, náboženství a sociální skupinu a schopnost v ní pracovat.

Klíčová slova: Didaktické projekty; náboženství; společenskovědní předměty; základní škola

1. Religion in Education – REDCo

The framework curriculum for basic education (FC BE) mentions in several places the phenomenon of religion as an educational topic: there the contents are presented in particular as part of an interdisciplinary theme of multicultural education. The question is how to bring it into teaching with respect to the changed social context in which religion exists not only in our country, but also in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century.

One of the expressions of this social climate changed can be the initiative to reach the EU this year in the form of recommendations resulting from the research report entitled *Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries (REDCo)*[1].

This is the first major European comparative research project on young people's views of religious diversity and possibilities for dialogue, interaction in classrooms and teaching strategies. An impulse of the research project was renewing importance of religion for individuals and for society in the national and international policy and public debate. Growing religious diversity has brought a new urgency, partly because it has an impact on 'social cohesion', which is a frequently cited policy goal.

The project originated in response to international documents such as *White Paper on Intercultural Dialog* (Council of Europe 2008) or *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (OSCE[2] 2007). Both documents stress the importance of dialogue between people of different faiths and convictions in the context of intercultural teaching and learning.

A team of highly qualified researchers in the humanities and social sciences developed thematic and methodological approaches in order to obtain an overview of how European citizens of different religious, cultural and political backgrounds can live together and how they can enter into dialogue of mutual respect and understanding.

The project ran from March 1st 2006 until March 31st 2009. Within the bounds of the project qualitative and quantitative research was carried out in eight countries (Germany, England, France, The Netherlands, Norway, Estonia, Russia, Spain) mainly focusing on religion in the lives and schooling of students aged 14–16 years. The students expressed their attitudes on the personal experience with religion, the social dimension of religion, and religion in school.

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[1] Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries.

[2] The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

REDCo was financed by the European Commission and its conclusions are addressed primarily to:

– EU Institutions (Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers), Council of Europe, United Nations (UNESCO, General Assembly, Alliance of Civilizations)
– National Educational Bodies of EU-member states, Educational Research Associations
– Non-Governmental Organizations
– Religious Organizations
– Universities and Schools

1.1 Key research finding of REDCo

– The majority of students appreciated the religious heterogeneity in their societies, although a range of prejudices were expressed.
– The most important source of information about religions and worldviews is generally the family, followed by the school.
– The school population includes a sizeable group of students for whom religion is important in their lives, a sizeable group for whom religion is not important and a sizeable group who hold a variety of occasionally fluctuating positions between these two poles.
– Irrespective of their religious positions a majority of students are interested in learning about religions in school.
– Students are well aware of and experience religious diversity mostly in, but also outside school.
– Students are generally open towards peers of different religious backgrounds. At the same time they tend to socialise with peers from the same background as themselves, even if they live in areas characterised by religious diversity.
– Students often express a tolerant attitude more at an abstract than a practical level. The tolerance expressed in classroom discussion is not always replicated in their daily life world.
– Those who learn about religious diversity in school are more willing to enter into conversations about religions and worldviews with students from other backgrounds than those who do not have this opportunity for learning.
– Students desire peaceful coexistence across religious differences, and believe that this is possible.
– Students believe that the main preconditions for peaceful coexistence between people of different religions are knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews, shared interests, and joint activities.
– In most countries students support the right of adherents to a moderate expression of religious faith in school. For example, they do not oppose in school the wearing of unobtrusive religious symbols or object to voluntary acts of worship for students who are adherents of a particular religion.
– Students for whom religion is important in their lives are more likely to respect the religious background of others and value the role of religion in the world.
– Most students would like to see school dedicated more to teaching about different religions than to guiding them towards a particular religious belief or worldview.
– Students express their desire that learning about religions should take place in a safe class-room environment governed by agreed procedures for expression and discussion.
– Students generally wish to avoid conflict on religious issues, and some of the religiously committed students feel especially vulnerable.
– Dialogue is a favoured strategy for teachers to cope with diversity in the classroom, but students are more ambivalent about its value since in practise, not all students are comfortable with the way diversity is managed in schools.

– Students generally favour the model of education about religion with which they are familiar.

On the basis of the research the importance of dialogue at classroom level is underlined which emphasizes an exchange of different perspectives of students concerning religions and worldviews.

1.2 Recommendations for the public sector of REDCo

1.2.1 Encouragement for peaceful coexistence
Education policy development and implementation need to focus on the transformation of abstract (passive) tolerance into practical (active) tolerance.
Actions:
– Counter stereotypical images of religions, present more complex images that show the impact of religion on society and the individual.
– Develop and strengthen skills for dialogue between pupils concerning different religions and worldviews.
– Provide opportunities for engagement with different worldviews and religions, (including cooperation with local communities in order to increase exchange between different religious and non-religious groups) and to offer opportunities for encounters between students of diverse positions vis-à-vis religion.

1.2.2 Promotion of diversity management
Citizenship education tends to focus on homogeneity; but in turning from passive to active tolerance, it is necessary to value religious diversity at school as well as at university level.
Actions:
– Offer opportunities for students to learn about and give space for discussions on religions
– Develop innovative approaches to learning about religious and worldviews in different subjects including RE, history, literature and science.
– RE and learning about religion must incorporate education for understanding and tolerance and take account of children's differing needs as they develop.
– Encourage universities to give fuller considerations to religious diversity in research and teaching.

1.2.3 Including religious as well as non-religious worldviews
School is a place where all students must be respected, regardless of their worldview or religious conviction. Religion is important to some students, and their beliefs must not be allowed to become an obstacle to their academic progress.
Actions:
– Inclusion of learning about different religious and secular worldviews in their complexity and inner diversity.
– Inclusion of the religious dimension into general intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

1.2.4 Professional competence
No changes can be made without education professionals and the required competence on their part. Such education would be needed both at initial training level and in the continuing professional development of teachers.

Actions:
– Prepare educators in different subjects to treat religious topics relevant to their subject, ensuring the inclusion of students regardless of their religious or non-religious background.
– Train educators in methods that support and encourage students to be comfortable with difference and to engage with the diversity of their personal experiences.
– The curriculum for teacher training should include the development of skills to organise and moderate in-class debates on controversial religious issues and conflicting worldviews.[3]

We consider recommendations resulting from this research particularly important because they formulate the requirements for changing educational approaches of education systems of European countries in terms of philosophical neutral empirical study. This is the appeal raised by the experts to change educational objectives, contents and methods in the field of intercultural education, in which the inter-religious dimension should be included.

2. Project *Man and the Christian Message*

Project of our *Pedagogical and catechetical centre of Ostrava-Opava diocese*, which we are presenting, we consider how to accommodate both the recommendations of that study and the contents of FC BE.

2.1 Description and Management of the project
Since the school year 2007/08 we have begun to offer programs based on RVP ZV and related to the topic of religion to primary schools and adequate classes of grammar schools.
Currently, we have prepared the following themes:
– *The Message of Christian Christmas* (with the theme of *St. Nicholas*, projects *Bethlehem can be everywhere* and *Living Advent Calendar*)
– *The Message of Christian Easter*
– *Man and Christianity*
– *Personalities of Christianity* (with the theme of *St. Cyril and Methodius*)

In order to meet the requirements of schools, we offer the programs through an hour-long input into the teaching and also through the form of accredited educational seminars for teachers.
An accredited educational seminar for teachers and educational advisors called *Daniel will never come again* offers the theme of how to deal with a classmate's death.
We make all the themes with respect to other Christian churches and denominations and in full respect for the religious neutrality of a school.
Each theme is drawn up separately for each educational level: for the first educational level (for 1st to 3rd classes) and the second educational period of the first grade (4th and 5th classes) and of the second grade (for 6th to 9th classes). In selecting the themes we try to respond to the interest of schools. For example, another series of the programs *The Message of Christian Christmas and Easter* has been created for repeated interest of schools.
In the future we are planning to draw attention also to other holidays that have Christian roots as a celebration of Halloween or St. Valentine's Day. To enrich the educational area of Language Learning and Linguistic Communication we would like to process the theme of the Bible,

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[3] REDCo: *Policy recommendations of the REDCo research project* [online]. 2008 [cit. 2009-12-04]. <http://www.red-co.uni-hamburg.de>.

particular literary types in the Bible. To deepen the interdisciplinary educational theme *Multicultural Education* we would like to offer the theme of solidarity or basic orientation in a pluralistic society, e.g., introduction to the world's religions.

One of the main purposes of the project is to contribute to the understanding of Christianity as a part of our culture and to create attitudes of tolerance and respect in accordance with the principles of life in a democratic society. We consider important that the project has good organizational background and that those who are participating in the project as lecturers, understand its mission. This is not only the organizational, methodological and motivational measures, but also evaluating the experience from the implementation of programs and creating work relationships between guarantor and lecturers.

To be able to offer these programmes to primary schools as well as through the form of supplementing the education for teachers, especially of teachers in social science disciplines, in 2008 we became an accredited educational institution in the Ministry of Education within the framework of further education of teachers. In this system we have also accredited training seminars for teachers.

2.2 Management of the project
    The project is managed by the guarantor, whose task is
– To develop a project plan for the current school year
– In collaboration with expert educators, theologians, psychologists and others to process new themes for each educational period
– To prepare documents for the accreditation of training seminars for teachers at the Ministry of Education
– Through the form of a leaflet to offer new themes for pupils and training seminars for teachers of primary schools and the adequate classes of grammar schools
– To offer training seminars for teachers of religion and especially from their ranks to create a team of assistants for realization of inputs into teaching
– To lead administration of the project
– To seek appropriate sources of finance for assistants

Our current offer, which is sent to schools as a leaflet with a cover note, has not met with a great response. But experience shows that it is much more successful when new themes are offered to a school by an assistant, mostly by a local teacher of religion.

In the case of interest in the theme from our offer, school management contacts the guarantor of the project. He proposes a suitable assistant for the school and agrees the date and details of realization. School management or a contact person at the school completes a registration file and send it to the guarantor of the project. The registration file is a source of information on the number of realized lessons and number of children and provides background for employment contracts with the assistants. Immediately after the realization of the lessons the guarantor of the project sends to the school a request for a referral evaluation. This evaluation is filled out and sent back by approximately 60% of approached schools.

	2007/08	2008/09
number of schools	44	42
number of children	5 096	6 067
number of lessons	263	313
number of tutors	30	31

2.3 Evaluations

2.3.1 Selection of positive responses
– Natural and gentle communication between the teacher and the children, who could express their opinions, was very effective.
– We use knowledge of these lessons in multicultural education. The history teacher thanks for the presentations and for historical information about Judaism.
– On behalf of the whole team of teachers I give thanks for non-commercial lessons that attempt to wake in children sense of goodness and sensitivity to relationships.
– Lessons contributed to create a pleasant Christmas atmosphere in the classrooms.
– We were surprised by the modern form of the lesson, which was very impressive and emotional. The lesson led children to reflect on themselves, was current and very well connected with prominent personalities of the contemporary world.
Received evaluations show positive rating
– Performing and professionalism of lecturers (37 %)
– Contribute to the climate in the classroom (31 %)
– Approaches to the themes and teaching methods (21 %)
– Enriching the curriculum (8 %)
– Other (2 %)
– Non-commerciality (1 %)

2.3.2 Evaluations – selection of negative responses
– Students of 7th classes were more critical about the lessons and didn't respond to the call for discussion. We think that the reason is the large number of children in classrooms.
– Your theme has been processed attractively, but the students didn't show corresponding activity.
– Lessons were generally well received, but some students protested against direct religious topics – this part of the lesson was rejected by some students in advance.
– The theme „Israel – country of the Christmas story" has been realized through lectures. In the opinion of my colleagues and me the theme is designed more for older students.
– The theme for the 4th classes was too difficult for this age group, time non-conceptual and contained too much historical information and constructs, which children of ten years cannot understand. The theme for the 6th classes was intended more for children who have a subject of religion.
Received evaluations show a negative rating:
– Passivity of children
– Stereotypes of religion
– Professionalism of lecturers

The number of negative responses is irrelevant to the positive ones. But it is likely that any further negative evaluation may come from schools that have not sent their evaluations.

3. Stereotypes

Seeing that one of the main intentions of the project is exploring own cultural background and helping to awake the incompatibility of racial, religious or other intolerance, as a basis for our further work we have put a question about which stereotypes the lecturers have met during the realisation of their lessons.

Stereotypes are erroneous and oversimplifying overgeneralizations often about people or groups, based on assumptions and misinformation rather than on facts. They do not consider the current circumstances of the individual or range of reasons why members of a group or category may differ from one another in a variety of ways. Stereotypes can lead to discriminatory behaviour, and often serve to justify prejudice.[4]

The source of data was the experiences of the tutors, which were collected through unstructured interviews. Through the individual interviews a question was put to the tutors: What stereotypes by pupils, teachers, or by the management of the school did you meet during the realization of the lessons?

32 individual interviews were carried out in which these types of responses were experienced:

3.1 Types of stereotypes

3.1.1 Stereotypes of the profession of priest

Tutor L. E. said: „I have specific experience from the realisation of lessons at the second age level at a primary school. I introduced myself at the beginning and I said I am a priest. The children in the classes despised me and openly rejected my teaching in advance. The following day after the consultation with the guarantee of the project I presented in the introduction only my name and I said my occupation at the end of the lesson. By this procedure I never met a similar approach from children of the same age in the same school."

3.1.2 Stereotypes of the theme

The Religion teacher J. V. described her experience: "I experienced a control approach at the hands of the school during the realisation of the first lesson. The assistant of the headmaster stood during the first part of my lesson at the back of the classroom and after he made sure that there was no manipulation on my part, left the class. The supervision of the assistant occurred even though the class teacher was there all the time. Consequently I learned from her that some teachers were afraid of manipulation, and therefore it was personally important for the deputy headmaster to supervise the manner of teaching."

3.1.3 Stereotypes of the subject religion

The Religion teacher J. K. described her experience: "I was led to classrooms with modern equipment in which I was throughout all my teaching. The groups of children took turns. When children were entering the classroom, where they saw on the interactive whiteboard the title of the presentation 'What do we know about the birth of Jesus of Nazareth?', I repeatedly heard how the children made contemptuous remarks: 'Why are we here when it is religion?' 'Is religion compulsory?' During the lesson children weren't open, and I felt great distance."

3.1.4 Stereotypes of the teaching of the other external organizations

The tutor B. V. said: "After realisation of my lesson at the first age level in a village primary school a teacher came to me and showed me colouring books and other promotional materials from the fire brigade. She did not comment on the teaching or my work, but she critically said: 'I don't want to advise you, but look at what the others are giving to the children...'"

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4 KEATS, J. (ed.): *Religion diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools (Intercultural Education, Human Rights Education)*. Council of Europe Publishing 2008, pp. 33.

3.1.5 Projection of own ideas of spirituality

Tutor J. P. said: "After the realisation of my lesson at the first age level one of the teachers came to me and enthusiastically told me how she understood the spiritual dimension of children and showed me a candle, which she uses during meditation with children."

4. Summary

These key lines of stereotypical images appeared in our particular practice when there was an interaction between people from the reality of school and the theme relating to religion. There are sufficient bases for our efforts to improve our service to schools – competently provide a way to implement the provisions of the framework curriculum:

To contribute to the development of children's personality, for example, by developing their ability to recognize and tolerate differences of other national, ethnic, religious and social groups and their ability for cooperation with them.

Shrnutí

**Vstupy do výuky a didaktické projekty s náboženskými tématy jako služba současné škole
a vyučujícím společenskovědních předmětů**

V praxi se objevují stereotypy mezi lidmi ze školního prostředí u témat vztahujících se k náboženství. Existují dostatečné základy pro naše úsilí jak zlepšit práci ve škole. Zahrnuje to osobnost dítěte, jeho původ, náboženství a sociální skupinu a schopnost v ní pracovat.