

# THE EFTRE JOURNAL

## *Welcome to the winter 2010 edition*

of this EFTRE newsletter. We are pleased that we have now gained ISSN status so if you are published make sure you quote the number you will find in the bottom left corner.

It was wonderful to see friends old and to make new friends at the 11th EFTRE conference in Bruges this summer. Details about the conference, the workshops and photographs from the conference can be found on the website. The feedback from the conference was very positive and despite the difficult financial times in which we are in we welcomed 77 delegates from 20 countries.

Alongside the conference there has been a continuation of the EFTRE seminars, see later in journal for more details of the last set in Vienna, and we are working with the Wegeland Centre in planning more activities for teachers of RE.

In this edition there are pieces by many of the workshop presenters from the conference, from one of the delegates and from the conference rapporteur. Alongside this are a report on RE in Slovakia as part of our ongoing series and a number of resource reports and book reviews.

We are entering into more challenging times for all of us in the financial changes that are effecting all of Europe, some parts more than others, and teachers of Religion, Morals, Ethicals and Philosophy have much to offer into the debate. There is some reevaluation of the values of society; as one speaker at a conference on Religion and Economics put it, *"People are becoming more selfish, more greedy, and the financial system has just been about maximising profit."*

Good RE teachers have always asked pupils to reflect on these difficult questions of worth and value. These are challenging questions to reflect about in our schools.

Paul **Hopkins**  
(Editor and Executive Officer)



## FROM THE CHAIR

Dear friends and members of EFTRE thank-you for promoting in your countries the work of EFTRE, for participating actively in creating new ideas for development, for making EFTRE known to teachers, people working in the field of teacher and in-service-training and to politicians.

The last few years we have tried very hard to enlarge our group, to get into contact with countries where we did not have members. We looked for topics that will be interesting for everybody and realized that that there are many themes, many words, that are understood very differently in different countries. We learned awareness and respect in relation to our work, various religions and worldviews. But there have also been great rewards, in working together and getting to know each other more and we have gained friendship.



We started to organize mini-seminars when we had our exec meetings and these have been a great success. Now we want to put together training packages and materials and want to spread the word of these and, if possible, to organize, with your help, mini-seminars. For example when we have our board meetings in countries where there are no exec members.

But we are also thinking of the Sharing of Excellence in Teaching and Learning within the fields of Religious Studies, Religious Education, Diversity and Intercultural Education by projects via the website, this journal (which we are keen to publish in a number of languages) and working with other groups. We would also like to organise teacher exchanges and teacher contacts for the



networking. The pre-work for this is developing group, encouraging membership and forging links. Comenius could be a possible dissemination networking for EFTRE members. This needs partners in many countries for collaboration and we need to start this now because the application will be in 2011, for 2 to 3 years. So the finishing dissemination could be the conference in Malmo in 2013.

Maybe "inter-generation" could be a subject because it is one of the coming keywords of the EU. Becoming an NGO with representation at a wider European level could also help and should be an aim of EFTRE and well as seeking funding for a wider European project.

But organising projects, NGO status and other projects needs financial support; so we need members to pay subscriptions to form a financial basis for this.

## EUROPEAN FORUM FOR TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

And last, but not least we are still considering the RE Olympics [see the Autumn 2009 journal] we want to encourage the board members to think if this is possibilities in their countries and to start on national level.

So, let us start another period of 3 years by creating and implementing new ideas and aim to work together with respect and enjoy our meetings not only for working but also for having good times together. I'm happy to see you or at the next meeting or at the next conference to come.

Sonja **Danner** - Chair EFTRE: 2010-2013



**Institutional Membership** of EFTRE is open to any organization whose role involves the development of Religious Education in the classroom. This could be teachers' organizations, advisors, teacher trainers or academics with a focus on classroom practice. The current subscription for institutional membership is €100 (or equivalent).

**Individual Membership** is also possible if you would like to support the work of EFTRE. The current subscription for individual membership is €12 (or equivalent).

If you or your institution would be interested in joining EFTRE see the section later in the newsletter on membership or contact us at [membership@eftre.net](mailto:membership@eftre.net)



EFTRE CONTACTS			
Chairwoman	Secretary	Treasurer	For Payments
Sonja Danner	Ms Marit Hallset-Svare	Hugo Verkest	Hugo Verkest
<a href="mailto:sonja.danner@kphvie.at">sonja.danner@kphvie.at</a>	<a href="mailto:marit.svare@dmmh.no">marit.svare@dmmh.no</a>	<a href="mailto:verkest.hugo@skynet.be">verkest.hugo@skynet.be</a>	FORTIS BANK
Website / Newsletter	Executive Officer	Conference	001-4734441-44
Paul Hopkins	Paul Hopkins	Hugo Verkest	BIC/SWIFT: GEBABEBB
<a href="http://web@eftre.net">web@eftre.net</a>	<a href="mailto:executive@eftre.net">executive@eftre.net</a>	<a href="mailto:conference@eftre.net">conference@eftre.net</a>	IBAN: BE 55 0014 7344 4144

## REPORT ON COGREE ACTIVITIES

The Intereuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS) in collaboration with the Coordinating Group for Religion in Education in Europe (CoGREE) has held their 4<sup>th</sup> Colloquy at Chateau Klingenthal on 4 to 8 October 2010. Main issues on the agenda were activities of the Council of Europe on intercultural dialogue and the religious dimension and the contributions of ICCS and CoGREE as well as of other nongovernmental organizations. Wim Kuiper, president of the Dutch organisation Besturenraad that works for the interests of the 2250 protestant-reformed schools reported about current developments in Christian education and in the collaboration of the schools. Dr. Tanja ap-Siôn from Wales introduced the basic concept and approach to religious education in Wales and Peter Schreiner informed about the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"). A special highlight of the program were the meetings with representatives from Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist NGOs, all active with the work of the Council of Europe.



As part of the programme the participants visited the Council of Europe for meeting staff of the Directorate General IV that is also responsible for education. Olöf Olafsdottir introduced the European Charter for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/>) that was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in spring 2010. Contributions of the colloquy are available under: [www.cogree.com](http://www.cogree.com). EFTRE was represented by Marit Svare Hallsted, EFTREs' secretary.



Peter **Schreiner**, CoGREE moderator  
Sweir **Frouws** (CoGREE Chair)  
Marit **Svare** (EFTRE Executive)  
[www.cogree.com](http://www.cogree.com)

### Members of CoGREE

**EAWRE**: The European Association for World Religions in Education

**EFTRE**: European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education

**EUFRES**: European Forum for Religious Education in Schools

**ICCS**: The Intereuropean Commission on Church and School

**IV**: The International Association for Christian Education



## THE 2010 EFTRE CONFERENCE

### “Challenging Religious Education - Poverty and Social Inclusion as European Issues”

#### A report from the conference rapporteur

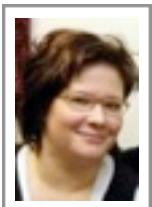
Reporting back on the events, keynote speeches and workshops of a 3½ day conference is no easy task, so please forgive me if I missed some crucial points or don't refer to the things that meant most to you. This is, inevitably, a personal and partial account of my experience of the conference, but I hope that it may remind you of some of the features that had significance for you.

As well as our speeches and workshops, we also experienced 'learning outside the classroom', through a choice of visits and our trip to the Battlefields of the First World War. There were conversations and meetings that took place in the spaces between. Often it is these 'in between' moments that are most valuable, but here are some reflections around our main conference themes:

1. Poverty & RE
2. Social Inclusion & RE
3. Justice, Europe & RE

Throughout, I will try to link my thoughts to the idea of 'challenging RE'.

#### 1. Poverty and RE



From Pauliina **Parhiala** we heard the shocking truth about poverty in our world. Lack of basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter is affecting almost half of the world's population. Six million children die of hunger every year, that's 17,000 per day. If we look with our pupils at the [Worldmapper](#) website from Sheffield University, we can see at a glance how our world is distorted by poverty and other forms of disadvantage. The facts can be discouraging, but there is a lot of good work going on to address the fundamental problems.

There are varieties of poverty, of course, not just physical. Amongst those explored at the conference were poverty of ambition and expectation; poverty of access to IT; poverty of power and poverty of experience. In RE we can play our part in raising awareness of some of these issues. In what ways, for example, can religions and beliefs be part of the solution, not part of the problem?

In the workshops, Chris **Callus** spoke of 'justice & charity for others', and showed how students at his school in Perth, Western Australia, put social concern into positive action, through a variety of charitable and justice initiatives. Hugo **Verkest** helped us explore, as we could do with pupils, artistic portrayal of different forms of poverty across the ages; and in our visit to Our Lady of the Potterie, I reflected on how well-chosen school visits can help pupils understand the role of the church in providing for the sick and poor and how this was often supported by wealthy patrons and then by the local government or municipality.

### 2. Social Inclusion and RE

Our opening keynote speaker, Bob **Jackson**, showed us how we might better link research, policy and practice. The fact of plurality in society means that we simply must help our pupils to tolerate difference and value diversity. He reminded us of the statement signed up to by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, that, "*...regardless of the religious education system that exists in a particular country, children must receive tuition that takes account of religious and philosophical diversity as part of their intercultural education.*"



In the workshops, Norman **Richardson** introduced us to a variety of teaching and learning strategies encouraging 'dialogue among equals', and Lesley **Prior** asked, 'How much tolerance do we tolerate?' in addressing issues of diversity of religious expression in our schools. On a visit to Bruges' L'Arche community (there are several in the UK too), we saw how the help for people with mental disabilities was, in the words of Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche communities, 'led by reality'.

### 3. Justice, Europe & RE

Poverty and social inclusion are local and global issues, of course, not just European ones. But it is worth noticing what issues are being raised across the continent. In Spain, for example, some Catholic parents have been withdrawing their children from citizenship lessons on the grounds that the course conflicts with their Christian principles. And in terms of dealing with such complaints, writers like Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im may become more influential, calling for national governments, human rights and religions to be put on an equal footing. None of these three should be excluded, and none prioritised over the others in solving controversial issues.

Recent studies have demonstrated the need for more equal societies. According to Wilkinson & Pickett's 2009 study, *The Spirit Level*, the consequence of a more unequal society is more crime, higher teenage pregnancy rates, higher rates of drug abuse, a higher prison population and so on.

Part of the solution may be for RE to work more closely with colleagues teaching citizenship. Writers like Noble prize-winning professor Amartya Sen have pointed to the importance of the democratic structures of free news-reporting and uncensored public criticism in the fight against injustice and poverty. He points out that, '*No famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy.*' If this is the case, then RE teachers need to be alert to the connections between the wisdom in the belief traditions and the power structures in society.

Dank u wel!

Dave **Francis** - Consultant for Religious Education



## TOWARDS A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF RE

Inclusive religious education has its role of reclaiming the voice, the value, and the experience of all marginal and oppressed groups in the educational realm of the school. The article offers theoretical assumptions and strategies how to recognize a diversity of voices and experiences of all students by challenging exclusive practices, questioning the dominant metaphors, and by learning to value differences. The author highlights the broadness of the concept of inclusive education, and raises the questions: Who is the outsiders/outsider in RE? Who needs to be included and how? What are the limits of inclusion?



### The strategies and ways of inclusion:



Inclusion has its broad meaning. Inclusive education is a complex concept with its various manifestations in school practice. Inclusion is not only about the students with disabilities. This approach encourages all students to belong. It is about the diversity in all its forms and genuine equality for all students. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows all individuals to be accepted, valued and secure. It is based on philosophical view that all learners regardless their ability, race, religious belief, socio-economic background, or genders have the rights to be educated together with other children. The

commitment of the school to offer a truly inclusive environment is highly essential for implementing the idea of education for all.

The most common misunderstandings about the inclusion that dominates the mindsets of educators and the policy makers are the following:

Building inclusive classroom more often is understood as defining the needs and the ways of including individuals. Instead, excluded individuals should be allowed to define their own challenges and to articulate their needs to participate more fully in the educational process. Schools should provide an environment free from bias, prejudice and intolerance.

Building the community of inclusive individuals is about inviting the marginalized individuals to the table of plenty. Instead, one needs to think differently about what makes 'us' and 'them' human, as well about our common humanity, values of equality, diversity and democracy. Instead, all students should be encouraged to reach their potential and teachers should have high expectations for all students' achievement.



Inclusive approach underlines changes in teachers' attitude. Inclusive education goes beyond it by the active transformation of the social and political order on all levels that promote human oppression embedded in diverse practices. Exclusion cannot be resolved with partial strategies. This requires political-ideological shift, epistemological aligning to a new discourse of inclusion as well as new pedagogical strategies of implementing a vision of education for all. This requires teachers to challenge predispositions and belief systems and to examine



critically assumptions and ideologies which underpin their practice and dominant ideologies which prevail in the society. Teachers need to embrace the paradigm shift toward the education for all, that would engage them in a dialogue across the cultures, religions, social backgrounds and that will ensure the sustainability of educational practice.



**Dzintra Ilisko, PhD**  
**Latvia, Daugavpils University, Institute of Sustainable Education**

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## **INCLUSION & CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE RE CLASSROOM**

### **A Northern Ireland Perspective**

#### **Understanding Controversial Issues in the Classroom**

Religion is a very controversial area, involving different truth claims, opinions and experiences. In many places cultural diversity is intensified by religious differences; in some countries or regions political controversies appear to be reinforced by religious issues. Northern Ireland is a very good example of this, but it is by no means unique.

Religious Education (RE) is also controversial – some people even regard it as the most controversial area in the curriculum. What should be included? How should it be taught? Should it even be taught at all?



Teachers of RE need to be aware of potential controversies in relation to their subject, in the classroom and in professional discussion, and to develop and model skills in dealing with them. It will be no less important to try to pass on those skills to the children and young people that they teach. Avoidance of contentious issues does no good whatsoever and may well reinforce the view that it is better not to talk about different religious beliefs and practices.

## Key Issues & Principles in Teaching Religion

The principles that were explored in the conference workshop were all drawn from professional development work done with student teachers and others in Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> They centre around the importance in RE of encouraging mutual respect in relation to differences. In order to achieve this, teachers & learners need to learn to talk comfortably and openly about religion and especially about differences between and *within* religions. This will require teachers to build up an ethos of trust and safety within any class or group tackling such issues. The diagram **Ground Rules for Religious Discussion** offers useful outline guidance for any groups involved in work of this kind. The *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (downloadable from <http://www.osce.org/item/28314.html>) also offer a strong basis for tackling such work.



## Practical Approaches

The Workshop offered experience of a number of kinaesthetic activities that could be used to develop confidence in discussing controversial issues with groups of children and young people when adapted in an age-appropriate manner. Such activities encourage participation and engagement, both non-verbal and verbal.

● **Line-Ups:** Participants stand in a line according to where they see themselves between the two extremes of each issue. This allows them to indicate a point of view without having to speak, though they can comment if they wish. Participants may adjust their position in the line as the discussion develops, illustrating the possibility of changing or modifying a point of view. Some of the examples used on this occasion were:

- *I believe that RE teachers should be practising members of a faith.*
- *I am confident about discussing controversial issues – not confident.*
- *I am embarrassed when people discuss socio-economic differences.*
- *I am well-informed about a range of different religions/cultures/ethnic groups – not well-informed ...*
- *I am in favour of separate religious schools – not in favour.*

● **Walking Debates:** This involves a similar process to Line-Ups, but there are three or more “corners” to represent, for example, AGREE – DISAGREE – NOT SURE – DON’T CARE. Among the statements



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<sup>1</sup> Many of these principles are outlined in a paper on “RE for Tolerance” – in *Studia Kulturowa* - pages 39-53 (University of Gdansk, November 2007): <http://studia.kulturowe.ug.gda.pl/sk-2.pdf>

used were:

- 🕒 *The most effective teachers of R.E. are those with strong personal religious convictions.*
- 🕒 *Religion should be kept personal and private. It should not influence politics!*
- 🕒 *Immigration from poor countries to Europe should be very strictly controlled.*
- 🕒 *Poor people are often to blame for their own problems! ("God helps those who help themselves!")*
- 🕒 *All schools should be racially and religiously mixed, even if you have to bus children in from different areas.*
- 🕒 *Racial mixing (e.g. in marriage) is very unwise and best avoided!*



Finally a number of Scenarios were offered for discussion – real situations that teachers of R.E. might have to confront but for which they may get little advance warning. Participants were asked what their options might be in each case:

- 🕒 A parent requests to withdraw their child from Religious Education unless their own religion is being taught.
- 🕒 A discussion on world poverty is sidetracked when some pupils frequently make remarks about other pupils who are asylum seekers from poorer countries in Eastern Europe or Africa.
- 🕒 A small number of pupils in your class are from quite poor immigrant families. You have to decide if it is okay to teach a unit of work on poverty and need.
- 🕒 A Muslim pupil joins a fairly monocultural class and anti-Muslim graffiti begins to appear around the school.
- 🕒 Your school does not permit any display of religious symbols, dress or artefacts. Parents ask you, as someone teaching religion, to help them change this policy.

**Norman Richardson**  
[n.richardson@stran.ac.uk](mailto:n.richardson@stran.ac.uk)



## INCLUSIVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES FOR TEACHERS IN TRAINING

Curriculum for Excellence is the new curriculum for pupils aged 3-18 in Scotland. It is based on experiential and active learning that is relevant to children. Teachers are encouraged to adopt engaging, enterprising and active learning approaches.

Fundamental to the teaching of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Scottish schools is the ability of the teacher to offer children experiences through which they will come to understand the nature of religions, religious experience and the development of the children's own beliefs and values. This kind of teaching requires teachers to be personally spiritually aware and responsive to the spiritual development of their pupils.

With this in mind Susan Leslie has begun the process of reflecting on the opportunities she offers to trainee teachers in terms of the teaching of RME in primary classrooms and their own personal spiritual experiences in order to increase their professional capacities in the teaching of RME. Her workshop gave a brief background to the type of work she undertakes with her students and then offered her workshop participants the opportunity to try some of the activities out for themselves.

The activities included:

- the use of music and pictures to create a sense of belonging,
- the special 'gift' seen in a mirror in a box to introduce the idea of the special and unique qualities of each individual and the special 'gift' that every teacher is to the children they teach,
- compliments activities to introduce the concept of humility and
- the use of articles and artefacts with special personal meaning.



All of these activities are used as part of the programme of teaching student teachers and Susan is continuing to work on collecting direct feedback from students and evidence from their teaching later in their training programme.

As one student said "It's like relating theory to practice when out on placement. Only by having the experiences ourselves can we teach RME to children."

More information about Curriculum for Excellence can be found at:

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/>



**Susan Leslie**

Teaching Fellow in Religious & Moral Education at the University of Dundee

## RE AND COMMUNITIES OF ENQUIRY

Throughout my career as an adviser, consultant and lecturer in Religious Education, I have observed many lessons in classrooms in and around London and beyond. Sometimes, it has been clear that many of the pupils have come from homes where religious belief and practice are important and often they have entirely secular backgrounds; but whatever the case, they invariably seem to me to be interested in religion and religious matters. However, that interest is often slowly destroyed by the teacher, simply because the questions being asked in the lesson are not the questions the pupils themselves want to ask. When the teacher sets an agenda for learning which has no relevance for children and young people, Religious Education (RE) can swiftly become a subject which fails to capture their imagination and leaves them feeling bored and disenchanted by matters which might otherwise have excited and enthralled them.



Here are two examples which will perhaps serve to illustrate my point:

1. In a primary classroom, children aged 6-7 years were listening to their teacher telling them the Christian story of Easter, from Palm Sunday, through the sufferings and death of Jesus to the accounts of His resurrection. One little boy put up his hand and asked the teacher "But is it true?". The teacher did not know how to answer, so ignored the question and instead, simply asked the children to retell the story in their own words.
2. In a secondary school, students aged 15-16 years were preparing for a public examination about Sikhism and were asked by their teacher to give an account of the key events of the first Baisakhi. (This was an essential revision exercise to ensure that all the requirements of the syllabus were being met). They dutifully did as they were told. At the end of the lesson I heard two students talking together as they left the room and one asked the other "Do you think Sikhism would have survived until today if Guru Gobind Singh had not founded the Khalsa at Baisakhi in 1699?"

Now I would argue that in both these cases, the questions being asked by the learners were potentially far more challenging and of far greater merit than anything their teachers were able to put forward!

This is why I am such a passionate advocate of those pedagogies which put the learner's questions at the heart of RE. These pedagogies include the 'community of enquiry' approach which is growing in popularity in many classrooms in England. Here is a simple explanation of how this works in practice:

The teacher chooses a stimulus to share with the class – this may be an artefact or object, a story, an image, a piece of film, a short text or a piece of music.

1. The learners are given an opportunity to encounter the stimulus for several minutes in silence and are then asked to think of any questions they would like to ask about it (these questions should be as open as possible, rather than simple closed questions where a single factual response is required).
2. After a little while each learner should be invited to share the questions with a partner and discuss them together.
3. In groups of 5 or 6, the learners should look at the questions they have developed and decide which is the most interesting to them overall.
4. Each group should then offer that question to the teacher and the rest of the class and a vote can be taken to discover which is the most popular. The winning question can then form the basis for enquiry based learning throughout the rest of the lesson - indeed, if there is a range of worthwhile questions to consider, then



more than one can be explored, perhaps in subsequent lessons.

This approach works because it gives the teacher a structure within which the class must work, but the learners are able to engage with the material more fully, because they can engage with it in a way that interests and intrigues them, and of course, the teacher does get to choose the stimulus, and if that is done with careful consideration, then there can be some guarantees about the kind of issues that may arise to be addressed!

I hope you will be tempted to try this for yourselves and I will look forward to hearing about some examples of successful 'communities of enquiry' from classrooms around Europe!



**Leslie Prior**  
Lecturer in RE - Roehampton University

## CONFERENCE FROM A PARTICIPANT'S VIEWPOINT



Brugge 2010 conference has meant for me: sharing experiences, meeting old friends and making new friends in RE field, enriching my knowledge in the related topic of the conference, enjoying every moment of the programme.

My memories talk to me about the Brugge tour on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August, an unexpected visit which consider questions of poverty and inclusion. First we visited the Our Lady Church and saw the Michelangelo Madonna. After that, in St John's Hospital museum, the painting entitled 'view of the old hospital wards' told us a lot about on the wards, about the medieval times like a real history book. In the end the exhibition 'moving archives' has touched our souls with its story about abandoned children. All those places which we visited during the tour spoke to me in terms of shaking the hands with living History.

The next day a new visit impressed me very much; visiting some graveyards from World War I in Ypres, one British and one German. New questions about inclusions and poverty in war arose. Looking around I was wondering how different we are even in death not only in the ordinary life. After that the Flanders field Museum invited us to follow the World War I times walking in the shoes a character, a person who lived, loved and maybe died during the war; at the end of my museum experience I've was very happy that I, as 'Marguerite' survived. Finally we observed the Menin Gate Ceremony which meant for me a bridge across a century between the ancestors and their heirs, a permanent voice from the present to the past: 'We will never forget you!'

If I have to summarize my Brugge conference experience I would say: wonderful and impressive historical places which enabled me to approach Religious Education through the lens of walking and shaking the hands with living History. That is way we should say thank you to all those people involved in organizing such event.

From my short but astonished experience in Brugge I could advice all of you: If you are in Brugge don't wait for a taxi; it is the most difficult thing to be found. Take a horse!

**Hsranti Bulugea**

Elected to the executive at conference



## RE IN THE NEDERLANDS IN 2010

Dutch society has been shaken up by a populist movement. This populist movement (hardly to be seen as a political party, because there are no members to the party except to the founder Geert Wilders) won in the last general election a landslide victory. The populists have made a political issue of Islam. They consider Islam as a (terroristic) ideology, not as a religion, which is strange to Dutch society. Teaching RE has become a risk to Dutch national identity, especially when an imam teaches the Islamic faith. This view becomes more and more common. On the other hand there is a call for tolerance, part of Dutch traditions in the case of the diversity of religion.



In each Dutch primary school teaching about religion is compulsory (so called Geestelijke Stromingen). Teaching in religion on behalf of Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic or Humanistic belief is being paid by the government since September 2009. This was a revolutionary change in Dutch educational policies. Teachers are specialized guest teachers, recruited from the religious societies. Parents have a choice as to which kind of teaching they find enriching to their child's education. In the current Dutch political situation there is a distrust to mainly Islamic teaching by imams. Politicians are in this way getting involved in speaking about the content of religious teaching.

In education general competence based teaching is being practiced. That means that attitude, knowledge and capacities are taught and practised. Critical voices state that this means a lack of knowledge. Children know nothing and teachers are ignorant, is becoming a common opinion. Therefore there is a search for a body of knowledge in teacher training. Next to this body of knowledge a large number of questions is being developed. This regards to every subject on the curriculum, including religion. It looks like the first step towards a compulsory national curriculum (75 %?) leaving a minor part to be filled up by choices schools make, based on their own (religious) background.

RE is in secondary schools mostly taught by theologically trained teachers. Lately in view of economic causes sometimes the theologian is replaced by a teacher of language or math e.g., teaching religion as a second subject. This means a lack of specialized knowledge.

**Henk Pol**

Professor of Education, Stenden University Leeuwarden



## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA



According to the Slovak democratic constitution (1993) and the following Legal Acts – the Concord with the Vatican, signed in 2003 and the Agreement of all registered churches with the state, signed in 2004 - there is a cooperation between the state and churches in the provision of Religious Education. The churches have the right to educate the whole range of generations via:

- a) Church education in church parishes;
- b) Establishing their own schools;
- c) Teaching religious education to all children that are registered for this subject by their parents, in public schools;
- d) Influencing young generation via leisure/out of school activities.

### History and Organisation of RE

In the time of socialism Religious Education (RE) ceased to exist as a compulsory subject, but it was never officially banned in Slovak schools. RE became a voluntary subject. Parents who wanted their children to attend RE lesson in schools had to register their children for these classes. There was a certain kind of persecution for doing so. After the political changes in 1989 the question arose on how to teach religion at schools and what conditions had to be met.



The Slovak Parliament decided that there should be two parallel alternatives for all children in state schools: RE and Ethical Education. At the upper stage of primary schools (age 10 - 15) and the first two years of the secondary school (age 15 - 17) the choice of the families between these two alternative subjects for their children has been compulsory. At the beginning both RE and Ethics were electives in the early primary years (age 6-10) and the last years at the secondary school (age 17 - 19).

According to the Act from 2004 the compulsory choice between RE and Ethics applies already to the primary level (age 6-10). In the last two school years at the secondary level RE lessons are still voluntary. Until 2008 the number of RE lessons used to be one lesson per week. Since 2008 when the new school reform started to take place the state education programme guarantees only one lesson once in two weeks. More lessons can be added according to the flexible educational programme of a specific school.

In the school year 2004/2005 in state schools three times more first year pupils chose RE than chose Ethics. In church schools almost 100% of pupils chose RE, whereas in private schools just the opposite occurred– only 4% of families chose RE. Across all primary school years, there were about twice as many pupils opting for RE rather than Ethics in state schools. In private schools these figures are reversed. Almost all pupils from the church schools chose RE.

To sum up, RE and Ethics are considered to be 'compulsory optional' subjects, which means that all parents have to make a choice between RE and ethics in state schools. Though RE and Ethics should both be part of the school timetable, thanks to organizational difficulties RE often takes place either very early in the morning or late in the afternoon, which is not the best time. This is

because of the variety of REs and the fact that most of the RE teachers are not on regular staff and come into schools as external teachers

### Characteristics of Religious Education in State Schools

Religious education (RE) in Slovakia has always been confessional. It has been focused primarily on teaching into a specific religious confession. It has always resembled the way of teaching religious education in church schools and even the church catechesis in parishes. For years the Slovak curricula of religious education have been aiming to develop children's involvement in a certain, just Christian denomination – nowadays they can practically chose from Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox or Reformed religious education. But also there are very rare exceptions (in cities) when the school decided to fulfil children's spiritual needs by a wider and more general approach to religion. Anyway, the children in Slovak schools are expected to learn their faith not only cognitively, but mainly "from inside". The partial aims are to develop children's inner religiosity, their personal relation to God through Jesus Christ, not only on cognitive but as well non-cognitive dimension of acquiring Christian faith, on the experiential learning about God and the Bible, on the positive concept of truth, etc. This approach requires the implementation of a wide range of adequate cognitive, affective and expressive teaching methods. The teachers, though paid from the state budget, should be members of a certain denomination. The evidence of it is a canonical commission from their own church who they represent.



The aims, the syllabus contents and the textbooks for teaching religious education are, basically, the responsibility of the specific denominations. Before implementing a curriculum in schools, it has to be officially approved by the church representatives and subsequently signed by the Ministry of Education. The school inspectors monitor the fulfilment of aims, the behaviour of the pupils and the formal side of teaching. The state does not interfere into the contents of the subject. That means, e.g., that the extent of information about other denominations and religions are fully in hands of a specific denomination.



On the other hand, the concept of "teaching about religion" is not been excluded and is also taking place in Slovakia, though in a limited extent. Generally, the teaching about other denominations and religions inside "Religious education" both in public and denominational schools has had a very small proportion in their curriculum. So being aware of the restrained approach of denominational religious education towards teaching other religions, the state policy is to mediate a certain quota of cognitive knowledge about religions to all secondary school

students in Slovakia. This subject matter is part of the compulsory subjects, e. g. "Citizenship" or "History". It aims to deepen students' knowledge about major world religions, their origin, their religious texts, doctrines and values; to help them to understand the behaviour of members of various religions and so to develop their analytical and comparative thinking skills.

The concept of "teaching from religion" has been so far the least applied concept in religious education in Slovakia. It would allow the students to learn and find source of meaning and life

orientation in various religions, not only in one's own denomination. It would build on the knowledge of one's own religion (first concept) and on a certain amount of objective information (second concept) about other denominations and religions. Thus it can develop critical thinking of students by trying to understand and solve problems with the help of various religions. Teaching methods used in this approach are not only cognitive, but also affective, including empathy and tenderness. It could develop the ethical and spiritual awareness of the students and their informed openness to dialogue.

The aims of RE, the contents of RE syllabus and the books for teaching RE are, basically, the responsibility of the specific denominations. According to the Concord and the Agreement between state and religious organizations, the state subsidizes the production of new textbooks. The churches produce their own sets of textbooks (Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, and recently even for Adventist children).

Recently almost all of the existing RE curricula underwent the process of their transformation. The analysis and comparison of the goals and contents of the present RE syllabuses in Slovak state schools reveal significant common ground:

### **A) AIMS**

All churches aim to lead the child:

- into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the explicit expression of this confession;
- to know the Trinitarian God (the Father, Son and Holy Ghost);
- to spiritual development in Christ, towards the spiritual maturity;
- towards a positive attitude towards his/her own confession;
- so that he/she develops into an integrated personality, able to be active in the church and secular society.

### **B) CONTENT**

The following topics appear in most syllabuses: God, creation, fall, sin, Biblical stories, Jesus Christ – life and teaching, Church, Creed, ten commandments, love, prayer, fellowship

### **C) METHODOLOGY**

There has been an evident shift developing away from the traditional way of teaching towards the use of more productive teaching methods, based on experiential learning. There have been several experiments with the project method, heuristic methods and the application of critical thinking (according to Bloom's taxonomy).

## **RE in church schools**

Speaking about religious education, church schools in Slovakia comprise a totally different category of schools though they are also subsidized from the state budget and have to fulfil the same requirements as public schools. Although not all of their students are religious, religious education is compulsory for all of them and there is a double amount of teaching lessons in the curriculum. Unlike in with public schools, it is assessed with marks just like other school subjects. In the secondary church schools RE can be a subject of the final exams (at the age of 19).

**RE Teachers**

The RE teachers should achieve the same level of professional training as the other teachers. The requirement is both the Bachelor and Master Degrees. For pragmatic reasons, the teachers are prepared for a combination of at least two school subjects (RE and maths; RE and Slovak; RE and music; etc.).



This means that one third of their study is devoted to RE, one third to the other subject and the last block of their studies consists of psychological and pedagogical subjects. They can be either graduates of theological schools with the pedagogical and psychological supplemental studies or they may be graduates of theological departments at teacher training faculties.

The state is legally obliged to provide a subsidy for RE teachers' salaries. So all the churches that have their own syllabus authorized by the church authorities as well as approved by the Ministry of Education have also the right to ask head-teachers of any school to provide an RE class focused on their own church / denomination and to ordain their own teachers.



On the other hand, the choice might be limited in a certain way if the groups are too small (a desirable size of the group would be a minimum of 12 children, but the classes should be offered also in case of a much smaller number).

Naturally there would be a financial restriction if all denominations decided to teach their own RE in one school.

That is why some minority churches are trying to agree on a mixed common group of children if they want to have a paid teacher.

Other smaller denominations would still prefer to teach their own RE even as unpaid volunteer.

**CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?**

What is Religious Education like in your country? We would like to hear from teachers and students on how RE takes



place in different countries around Europe. This might be an overview like the one above on Latvia or it could be about your classroom. If you would like to write a short article (between 300 and 500 words) then please send this to [newsletter@eftre.net](mailto:newsletter@eftre.net)



## THE EFTRE SEMINARS: VIENNA 2010

We were very pleased to welcome about 40 teachers and those supporting teachers from Vienna in the building of the Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule. Three seminars were given by members of the EFTRE executive.

### **SEMINAR 1 - Thinking Skills and RE**

**Lesley Prior** (UK) In this seminar, students learned to identify different types of thinking skills, explored their generic characteristics and evaluated some of the ways in which they are used in RE. There was an opportunity to participate in some workshop activities.



### **SEMINAR 2 - Religiöse Feste als Ausdruck des Glaubens und der Kultur**

**Marit Svare** (Nor) In Norwegen sind etwa 80% Mitglied einer christlichen Glaubensgemeinde, aber nur wenige gehen regelmässig zum Gottesdienst. Trotzdem sind christliche Feste - und besonderes Weihnachten - sehr wichtig in der norwegischen Kultur. In diesem workshop arbeiten wir mit dem Thema Weihnachten im Spannungsfeld zwischen Glauben und Kultur.



### **SEMINAR 3 - Using Technology to support teaching in RE**

**Paul Hopkins** (UK) In his seminar students will look at some criteria for making judgements about the use of internet resources, at some of the resources that can be found on-line at some of the ways of using technologies more creatively in the teaching of religion and at ways in which the technology can be used in assessment. He will look at how RE students can become film-makers as a core activity in learning about religions and religion. If you would like a copy of this presentation please contact Paul



More about these seminars can be found in the **members' section** of the EFTRE website at [www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net)

## 9th INTERNATIONAL JTEFS/BCC CONFERENCE “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - CULTURE - EDUCATION”

### **BCC Mission - Reorientation of Teacher Education and Research in Education for Sustainable Development - May 18-21, 2011 - Siauliai, Lithuania**

We are proud to announce the 9th International Conference "Sustainable Development. Culture. Education" of JTEFS/BCC (Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability/Baltic & Black Sea Circle Consortium in Educational Research) and UNESCO Network on Reorientation of Teacher Education towards Sustainability. The idea of Conference was suggested by the Faculty of Education and Management and the first time it was held at the Daugavpils University in 2003 when it was closely intertwined with the establishment of the European Network of the UNESCO/UNITWIN project. From 2004 to 2010 the Conference was organized by the members of BCC - Tallinn Pedagogical University (Estonia), Vechta University (Germany), University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Debrecen (Hungary), and Anadolu University (Turkey), Daugavpils University (Latvia), UNESCO (France). Next year the Conference will be organized by BCC in Siauliai University in Lithuania, Siauliai

As usual, the Conference will coincide with the publication of spring volume of Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability and Conference proceedings (see website section Publications).

Also, it is a tradition since 2006, that all the participants of the Conference become the members of Baltic and Black Sea Circle Consortium in Educational Research established in 2005 during the 3rd JTET Conference at the Vechta University.

UNESCO Network on Reorientation of Teacher Education towards Sustainability was established in October 2000 and its first big success was creation and publication of UNESCO Educational Sector Guidelines and

Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability in 2005. In 2006, 2008 and 2010, the biannual meetings of network have become the satellite events for JTET/BCC Conferences signifying the next phase of UNESCO Network activities - the international dissemination and implementation of Guidelines and Recommendations.

The association "Education for Sustainable Development" established in 2007 by the Institute of Sustainable Education will work in close cooperation with the host universities to ensure the successful work of the Conference.

Language of the Conference: English

#### **Important dates**

Registration and abstract submission deadline: early registration and abstract submission from the 1st of November till February 15, 2011; final registration deadline March 15, 2011.

Paper submission deadline: papers for publication in conference proceedings are accepted throughout January and February 2011. All papers that will be submitted after March 1, 2011 will be published after the conference.

Registration fee deadlines: early registration deadline March 15, 2011; final registration deadline May 6, 2011.

Participation fee: 150 EUR

In case you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact Orinta Tamutiene, [orinta@tsi.su.lt](mailto:orinta@tsi.su.lt)



## THE 11th NORDIC CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

6th-9th June, Aarhus, Denmark



The 11th Nordic Conference of Religious Education (NCRE) will take place at the Faculty of Theology, Aarhus University. We welcome researchers, practitioners and others interested in religious education to contribute in exploring the conference theme

The focus of the 2011 NCRE conference will be on different ways of understanding and approaching Religious Education (RE) in a modern context. During the last decades, the field of RE has become polarized. While some have advocated for religious formation and socialization to be the core intention with this area of education, others have rather highlighted communication of knowledge and critical information. Whichever position one supports, the framework of RE is to some extent dictated by governmental control. Different positions will be given the floor during this conference, opening up for discussions on differences and/or concordances on what the task of RE should be in a globalized future.

The conference language is English, although papers presented in one of the Nordic languages are accepted.

<b>Time:</b>	The conference starts at 11:00 on 6 June and ends at 13:30 on 9 June.
<b>Venue:</b>	The conference will take place at the Faculty of Theology, Aarhus University.
<b>Registration:</b>	The registration fee of DKK 1800 (ca. € 240) includes admission to all sessions, lunches, dinners, refreshments during breaks and an excursion on Tuesday.

Registration is through the conference website, hosted by the Faculty of Theology. The website can be accessed at <http://teo.au.dk/en/research/current/religeducat/>

For more details on accommodation and transport links see the EFTRE website [[www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net)] and click on the link in the NEWS section.

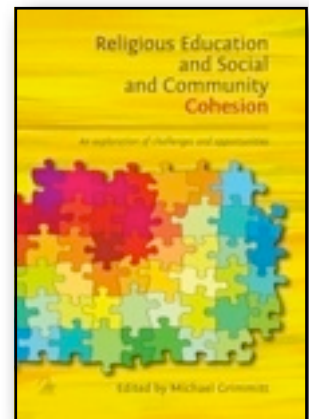
## REVIEWS AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS

### Religious Education and Social Community Cohesion

**Author:** Michael Grimmitt

**Publisher:** McCrimmons

336 pp. 17.95 GBP, **ISBN** 978-0-85597-710-8



For his final book in a long and influential career in RE, Michael Grimmitt has commissioned fourteen chapters from distinguished educators and religious educators which address such questions as these and many more, not with the intention of closing down the current debate but opening it up and taking it further. In an introduction and an extended end piece, equivalent to four chapters, he also provides a personal commentary on how during his career several stages in the metamorphosis of the subject have occurred with a new stage now emerging in response to the changed circumstances of globalised and politicised religion.

This collection of authors covers all area of social cohesion from questions about examination syllabuses, how pedagogic theory contributes to inter-cultural understanding and questions of social justice. Social cohesion is something that we all need to be aware of in a changing Europe and recent history tells us how important this is. This book offers an important contribution to this vital subject.

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### Ethics on-line

**Author:** Joe Jenkins

**Website:** <http://www.ethicsforschools.co.uk>

The website previews a collection of films for stimulating thought about ethical ideas for children aged 14 to 18. There are three areas: Environmental Ethics, Sexual Ethics and War and Peace, each of these areas has a number of films which provide exciting stimulus for children undertaking study in this area.



Whilst these films are in English the visuals are very powerful and could be used for children from a variety of background and the topics are ones that are engaging and important in modern European RE, citizenship and philosophy agendas. Whilst some of the scenes may cause some discomfort this is not surprising as the films tackle difficult areas that cause controversy and there are areas which are uncomfortable to encounter. It is good that Jenkins does not shirk from tackling these difficult areas.

As well as the film clips the DVD includes teachers notes that include pre-screening questions, reflections for after screening use as well as handouts and presentations for the teacher to use. In addition the script from the film is available for classroom use with a glossary of key words.

See the website for more details and for sample clips from all the films.

Joe **Jenkins** has been writing materials for teaching children about ethics for over 30 years and has been using and making film for much of this.

## Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice

**Authors:** Julia Ipgrave, Robert Jackson and Kevin O'Grady (eds)

**Publisher:** Waxmann (2009)

237 pp. 24,90 EUR, **ISBN** 978-3-8309-2158-5

It brings together a group of teachers and teacher educators who have researched their own students' learning in schools and universities

The writers look at combining the methods of action and practitioner research with the Warwick (Jackson et al) interpretive approach to the study of Religions Education. The book considers how research takes places when there is a community of practice rather than individual researchers.



**Part I** of the book (Jackson and O'Grady) sets out the theoretical background to the interpretive approach and to action research, this section outlines these well and is most useful to those new to these ideas.

**Part II** is a series of case study reports from members of the community of practice. It covers a range of arenas including schools (across a range of ages), universities and teacher education.

**Part III** synthesises the case studies with both the interpretive approach and the nature of action research and reflects on how effective these are as methodological tools.

**Part IV** connects the research with the findings and the constructs from REDCo.

This book is very useful for those who are looking at how religion effects community cohesion and for those working in the areas of action research or ethnographic research and looking to develop communities of practice. It also shows very effectively the way in which theoretical academic perspectives can be researched in classrooms and lecture rooms and how this theory is played out in practice in these venues.

The extensive and well written case studies will be useful for practicing teachers looking for ways to develop their practice and for beginning researchers looking to be more reflective about their own practice. It will greatly assist those who are contemplating empirical work in religious education.

The book is also an excellent introduction to the interpretive approach; an important pedagogical approach to the teaching of RE (c.f. Grimmit, 2000) and again shows how theory and practice interrelate. The book also allows one to become part of the community of practice and research which it describes.

Paul **Hopkins** - Lecturer in RE - University of Hull (UK)



## The challenge of teaching controversial issues

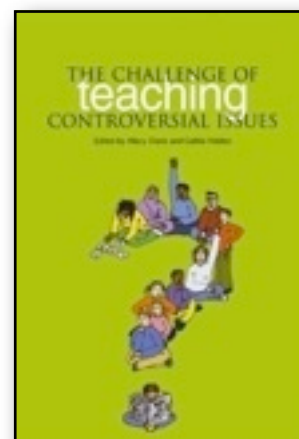
**Authors:** Hilary Claire and Cathie Holden (eds)

**Publisher:** Trentham Books (2007)

237 pp. 18.99 GBP, **ISBN** 978-1858564159

Religious Education / Religious Studies has always been the arena where difficult and contentious issues are discussed. A description was once used that teaching RE was like, 'walking on eggshells whilst dodging thunderbolts', it is a good one.

So any support for those grappling with the growing number of controversial and contentious issues which arise in classrooms is welcome. These include issues which are local, national and international.



**Part I** of this book sets a theoretical background and talks about educational policy.

**Part II** are the case studies and cover a range of issues: war and peace, using drama, using literature, sustainability, democracy, Islam, and tourism.

**Part III** deals with whole school issues and the values that underpin these and with the actions that can be taken including some key strategies for those who are new to teaching controversial issues.

This book is set in an international context and so many of the issues with which it deals are applicable in many of our classrooms across Europe.

Children in our classrooms are both exposed to a wider and wider range of information about the world and because of the background they come from they bring into the classroom a range of experiences, ideas and questions that can be difficult to raise and difficult to discuss in the classroom. The language that they use, can the word "hate" be used in the classroom; the ways in which they are able to express themselves, using drama, literature or other methods; and the topics which they bring up such as war, fundamentalism, extreme bullying, racism, sexism are all topics which are dealt with in this book.

Children urgently need to learn about controversy and democratic and rational approaches to managing conflict and evidence from teachers indicates that while they believe teaching about controversial issues is crucial, they find it challenging. They want to understand their own role and be equipped with effective approaches to sensitive and complex issues. Each chapter dissects the nature of a specific controversy and offers practical strategies for helping students work through possible solutions. This book provides conceptual clarity and practical value to everyone concerned with teaching about controversy today and will be recommended reading on PGCE and undergraduate Education Studies courses.



Paul **Hopkins** - Lecturer in RE - University of Hull (UK)

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Overview of activities and meetings - Europe and Education 2011	
<b>2011</b>	
18th-19th Month	<b>EFTRE</b> seminars in Seville, Spain and Board meeting.
11th-15th April	<b>EUFRES</b> forum in Madrid - for more see <a href="http://www.eufres.org">http://www.eufres.org</a>
18th - 21st May	<b>JTEFS / BBC</b> conference: Siauliai, Lithuania - see article above
6th - 9th June	<b>Nordic RE conference:</b> Aarhus, Denmark - see article above
29th June - 3rd July	<b>ICCS</b> conference in Prague - for more details see <a href="http://www.iccsweb.org">www.iccsweb.org</a>

### COULD YOU CONTRIBUTE?

We are happy to consider items for the journal or the calendar of events. Please contact us at [newsletter@eftre.net](mailto:newsletter@eftre.net).

Items for the journal should be written in English, or your mother tongue, and should be 300 to 700 words in length on a theme connected to religious education, spiritual education, inter-cultural education or related fields. It should appeal to those working in classrooms, or preparing those working in classrooms across Europe. We welcome articles on:

- Religious Education in your country
- Examples of good practice in your country / institution
- Book Reviews
- Resource Reviews
- News about RE in your country
- News about forthcoming events
- Anything else that you think is interesting about RE in Europe

Contributions should be sent in plain text (.doc, .txt, .rtf) files attached to an e-mail with images as separate files (.jpg, .tif, .gif). Items for the next newsletter should be sent by 30th April, 2011.

