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**Editorial and Summary in English**

by  
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*This Editorial is intended to make the major contents of the contributions in German known to an international readership. It is based on the supposition that such an additional overview of the journal's articles is more profitable to international English-speaking readers than just additional English abstracts at the beginning of each German article.*

*We appreciate any reactions and comments by readers from outside the German language context and are grateful for suggestions that can help us to further improve our journal's accessibility and attractiveness for an international readership.  
(You are invited to e-mail your comments to [manfred.pirner@ewf.uni-erlangen.de](mailto:manfred.pirner@ewf.uni-erlangen.de)).*

**Thematic Issue: Schoolform-specific Religious Education**

Issue-Editors: BERND SCHRÖDER and MICHAEL WERMKE

Background information for non-German readers:

In Germany Religious Education is an obligatory subject (with exemption possible) at all public state schools. Education policy in Germany is decentralized and in the hands of the federal states, which sometimes makes things quite complicated. However, there are some basic structures that apply to the whole country. School in Germany starts after kindergarten with elementary school ("Grundschule") for all from age 6 to 10 (classes 1 to 4). At secondary level (classes 5 to 10, in Germany called "secondary I-level") there are a number of comprehensive schools in some German states, but basically, there is a three-tier system of general education that offers three achievement levels: high school ("Gymnasium"), middle school ("Realschule") and – traditionally – the so-called main school ("Hauptschule"). As the latter has more and more turned into a 'school for leftovers' in public opinion, several German states have recently made efforts to improve the main schools' bad image. Thus, they have promoted close co-operation (e.g. in Baden-Württemberg) or even fusion (e.g. in Saxony, partly in Bavaria) between main schools and middle schools, and they have integrated achievement classes in main schools that lead up to the middle school graduation. Qualification for university can be obtained at higher high school level (classes 11 and 12, in Germany also called "secondary II-level") or at vocational schools. There is a great variety of vocational schools ("berufliche Schule") in Germany, ranging from schools that aim to help young people with unsatisfactory school achievements to find vocational training places up to schools that qualify their students for universities of applied sciences. Handicapped or learning-impaired children may at-

tend special schools called “Sonderschule” or “Förderschule” – which will probably change in the near future due to the UN resolution demanding far-reaching inclusion of disabled children in non-separated schools.

### **Introduction into the thematic issue**

by BERND SCHRÖDER and MICHAEL WERMKE

The editors of the thematic issue point out that most contributions to the academic religious education discourse in Germany are implicitly guided by the practice of high school education, mainly because the great majority of academics attended high school themselves and many of them also taught at high schools. In line with this finding it seems that the schoolform-specific perspectives have not found much attention in the recent discussions about RE. Yet, as an overview shows, the distinction between ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ education played a considerable role in the historical development of the German school system and religious education in it. Facing the present integrative tendencies in school policy triggered by the crumbling ‘main school’ (‘Hauptschule’) and the UN resolution demanding inclusive school education, the question of school-specific religious education may seem already a little outdated. Still, as long as separate school forms with different profiles exist, it seems appropriate and helpful to carefully consider how RE can relate to these profiles in a competent way so that different children and youngsters can best profit from it.

### **Religious Education at pre-school level**

by RAINER MÖLLER

The institutions of pre-school education and their structure in Germany are very specific. Especially the high percentage of children with migration background poses a considerable challenge. In religious education processes at pre-school level the children’s cognitive and developmental preconditions have to be taken into careful consideration. Empirical studies show that the practice of religious education in day-care centres does not achieve the quality intended by theoretical concepts and models. For this reason the education of pre-school teachers, which at present takes place at vocational schools, should find its way into university – as it already happens in some German states. This would also promote urgently needed empirical religious education research at elementary level.

### **Religious Education in the „Grundschule“ [Elementary School]**

by PETRA FREUDENBERGER-LÖTZ

In this article the relevance of basic religious education in elementary schools is presented against the background of the students’ heterogeneous experiences and individual life contexts. Beside recent research results on students’ psychological and socio-cultural conditions, the author presents new didactical principles that need to be applied and/or strengthened in the practical field. The author makes it clear that

religious education has a special status in the canon of elementary schools and that teachers find it an important subject to which they turn with great motivation.

### **Religious Education in the “Hauptschule” [secondary „main school“]**

by FRANK MICHAEL LÜTZE

No other school form has experienced more media attention over the last years than the German “Hauptschule”. There have been discussions about the abolishment of the “Hauptschule” in favor of co-educational school forms, the student’s lack of discipline, alarming results of comparative performance tests and the high rate of dropouts, which in turn have fueled the critical questioning of the own right of this school form. Because of the pedagogical debates one can easily lose track of the important didactical tasks. Negative media attention is more prone to producing clichés than it contributes to a differentiated perception of students in compulsory schools. In this sector a lot needs to be done, especially in academic Religious Education, which has mostly blinded out the specific issues related to the “Hauptschule”. The author aims at sketching some points and desiderata of a Hauptschul-specific RE. He focuses on the students whose learning and well-being should be the top criterion for decisions on the right and limits of schoolform-specific Religious Education.

### **„Realschule“ – „Extended Realschule“ – „Mittelschule“ etc. [different forms of middle school] – an indication of problems**

by HANS BALD

The article examines the position of the German middle school (“Realschule”) within the variety of school forms on the secondary level. It looks out for the specific profile of the Realschule and a corresponding special pedagogy, and against this background it discusses the possibility of a Realschule-specific pedagogy of Religious Education. To this end, the problem of defining schoolform-specific characteristics of the students and the teachers is focused and the material basis of RE at the Realschule (curricula, text books, methods, etc.) is analyzed. As theoretical foundations as well as empirical data are missing, the author aims at starting with an RE theory of the secondary school level as a basis for differentiations into the different school forms. Although some steps and perspectives into this direction are offered, the conclusion is that more questions than answers remain.

### **“Gymnasium” [High School] at Secondary Level I**

by HEIKE LINDNER and ULRIKE BAUMANN

The article starts with the general educational intentions of secondary education as put down in the new competence-oriented curricula.

Criteria of formal education such as religious competence and output-orientation must be related to the tension between “lived” and “learned” religion in the students’ own biography. However, specifics of different school forms are also influenced by the different regulations of the federal states that affect the institutional and legal sta-

tus of Religious Education. The students' conditions and prerequisites at secondary level are mainly influenced by puberty, whose characteristics as a transitional phase of life are explained by developmental psychology and its classical theories of developmental stages. The specific task of Religious Education can be seen in accompanying the students in their transition from "childhood faith" to "adult faith". Only on the basis of a successful transition in this field, difficult questions and topics such as theodicy or religious pluralism can be adequately addressed.

As to the teachers, it becomes clear from empirical research that RE teachers at high schools tend to favor cognitive and discursive methods and approaches. Competence-oriented theories can, together with the "elementary approach", promote more open, holistic and experimental forms of teaching and learning at high schools.

### **Starting point: theology .Religious Education at Secondary II-level [= A-Level]**

by PETER KLIEMANN

After introductory observations on the history and status of Religious Education on the "Secondary II"-level, the students and the teachers of this school form are characterized. Exemplified by the development of RE curricula in Baden-Württemberg, a general outline of the development of RE pedagogy over the last decades is given. Observations and questions on "religious school life" on the "Secondary II"-level as well as an overview of existing teaching materials, follow. Since at present, a specific pedagogy of religious education for the "Secondary II"-level exists at best in the form of first fragmentary approaches, seven desiderata respectively perspectives are outlined at the end of the article.

### **Religious Education at vocational schools**

by ROLAND BIEWALD and ANDREAS OBERMANN

Proceeding from a characterization of vocational schools, the position of Religious Education in these schools is presented. A look at empirical studies on students, their values and religious upbringing, as well as teachers, helps to understand the psychological and socio-cultural prerequisites of Religious Education in vocational schools. Its didactical profiles are illustrated by the goals, topics, and competences of exemplary curricula. The interconnectedness of RE at vocational schools with theology, church, on-the-job-training and various employers is demonstrated to be mirrored in the teaching concepts and material as well as in the institutions of research and learning support linked to vocational schools. Finally, perspectives and desiderata for the further advancement of religious education in vocational schools are presented.

### **Religious Education at "Förderschulen" [special schools for handicapped or learning-impaired students]**

by ANITA MÜLLER-FRIESE

In all the ten different forms of German schools for children with learning difficulties, Religious Education is taught as an ordinary subject. Being situated between special

needs education and religious education in general, the subject faces the challenge to help students who need special education to develop and strengthen their religious competence. Teachers focus on individual learning potentials as well as learning needs and are challenged to practice holistic, experience-related forms of religious learning and teaching.

Referring to the term “Inclusion”, a specific necessity is pointed out: In an interdisciplinary dialogue conceptual and didactical-methodical ways have to be sought to regard the heterogeneity of learning groups as a chance and to reduce the exclusion of handicapped people by the school system.

## **Research and Discourse**

### **Competence-oriented learning in Religious Education – Challenges by an RE paradox**

by HENNING SCHLURß

This article is based on the thought that Protestant Religious Education at school should be a subject just as all other school subjects. If so, it has to conform with the concept of subject-specific competence. This requires special attention to the core of the subject in teaching as well as in achievement testing. However, the core of RE is the core of Protestantism, namely the doctrine of the justification. This doctrine says that in the eyes of God a human being is not measured by his achievements nor by any specific competence, but by the grace of God, which is a free gift to us. If this insight is to describe a competence of the student that can be tested, a process of teaching and learning is needed that helps to widen and critically reflect on the students' experiences. The achievement evaluated in such a test can then be the students' knowledge that humanity in the eyes of God is not defined by work and achievements. The teachers are required to be aware of this at least latently paradoxical structure of Protestant religious education and address it creatively.

### **Learning with inter-religious overlap situations – reflections on the starting points of a life-world oriented inter-religious pedagogy**

by JOACHIM WILLEMS

This article sketches the basics of a lifeworld-oriented concept of inter-religious learning. It is argued that, facing the religious and cultural plurality in our present society, competence-oriented learning should start from inter-religious “overlap situations”, i.e. situations in the students' every-day life that are characterized by the encounter of different religions. Students should be supported in their ability to act in a competent way in such situations. To this end, they need to develop skills to interpret and critically evaluate inter-religious overlap situations. Also, they need to develop options of acting adequately on the basis of sound knowledge about different religions. Finally, inter-religious competence also refers to attitudes and beliefs.