



WORKING PAPER

COUNTRY REPORT: GERMANY

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1. Historical context

The educational system in Germany developed in close connection with the rise of the nation state and its attempts to transform the confessional divisions among feudalist microstates (“Cuius regio - eius religio”).

1.1. Tripartite structure of the educational system

The structure of the German educational system is as follows:

- *Elementary stage* (“Elementarbereich”; Early Childhood Education)¹: all non-compulsory education and care institutions catering for children from 3 years onwards before the start of primary school.
- General education (“*Allgemeinbildende Schulen*”):
 - a. **Primary stage** (“**Grundschule**”): compulsory school starting at the age of 6 years, usually lasting 4 years, according to the principle “one school for all”, with current regional attempts to extend it to 6 years (e.g. in Berlin, Brandenburg, Hamburg).
 - b. **Secondary stage I and II** (aiming to form homogenous groups according to merit, ambition and/or social background): Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium = “tripartite educational system” (apart from comprehensive schools in some federal states).
- *Vocational education* (following Secondary stage I, “*Berufsbildende Schulen*”, a dual system of training on the job and vocational schools, in certain professional fields replacing Secondary stage II for specific studies in Higher Education)
- *Higher Education* (Universities, Fachhochschulen, specialised Hochschulen for music, arts etc.).
- *Special needs education* (“*Sonderschulen*”), for children with physical or developmental disabilities (called “*Behinderte*”), as a parallel school system from primary stage onwards².

¹ Administratively still part of social services but declared as part of the educational system in 1970/71 by the “Strukturplan des Deutschen Bildungsrats und der Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung”.

² Five per cent of all pupils in Germany go to Sonderschulen, a high percentage in international comparison (Kahl, 2007).

The system gradually developed from the end of the 18th century onwards, with a general compulsory education starting in the 19th century in Prussia and other German states. Separated along the tripartite structure of “lower”, “middle” and “higher” education, it aimed at developing a sense of national unity, a qualified administration and an enhancement of individual life chances. (Leschinsky, Roeder, 1976) In the German states and in the unified Empire, 90 per cent of the population received access only to the lower school level until 1914 (“Elementarschule”). The whole population was literate by 1890 (Wehler, 1995, p.1193).

1.2. Role of the churches in education

Ninety-five per cent of all Protestant children and 90 per cent of all Catholic children attended denominational church schools until 1914 (Wehler, 1995, p.1195). Churches were traditionally the main bodies responsible for lower level education – that is, for the majority of the population - in German states until 1872, when Bismarck tried to reduce church and feudal responsibility for schools in Prussia (“Schulaufsichtsgesetz”) and to replace church inspectors by state inspectors. This was part of the German Culture War (“*Kulturkampf*”).³ However, due to limited financial state resources, church inspectors dominated school inspection until 1918, and also after 1945 until the 1960s. The profession of teacher gradually improved in status and income through a high percentage of organised teachers (Lehrerverein), even if substantial differences have remained visible in the training and payment of teachers, and in the number of pupils per teacher, between elementary schools and middle or higher education institutions. This is related to the greater ‘weight’ accorded in German ‘Bildungstheorie’ to those stages of the process most immediately relevant to adult life than to the earlier developmental stages, which were neglected until the insights of modern child psychology were acknowledged (Arbeitskreis Grundschule, 1971, p.91).

³ “Kulturkampf”: Conflicts such as the Vatican’s reaction to the challenge of liberal civil society after the (failed) revolution in 1848 (e.g. in Encyclica Quanta Cura 1864 demanding all scientific research to submit to the authority of the Catholic Church, or anouncing the papal infallibility at the Vaticanum I. in 1870) on the one hand, and an aggressive Protestantism on the other hand, fusing with the new political religion of nationalism (e.g. the Berlin court chaplain Adolf Stoecker calling the foundation of the unified Deutsches Reich in Versailles in 1871 the perfection of “the Holy Protestant Empire of German nation”, Wehler, 1995, p.383).

1.3. History of constitutional regulations

After World War I, the Weimar Constitution in 1919 sanctioned the separation between state and church, abolished the monarchical system of government and deprived the territorial churches of their supreme Protestant episcopal heads. The Weimar School Compromise (1919/1920), embodied in Article 146 of the Weimar Constitution, mandated access to secondary and higher education solely on merit (instead of class or religion), added civics to the curriculum and gave precedence to the primary school (“Volksschule”) which integrated children from all religious and social backgrounds (Lamberti, 2002). Religious education was declared a “regular school subject”, corresponding to the tenets of the religious communities. State-church traditions were maintained in various forms in Germany, not only during the Weimar Republic but also during the Nazi dictatorship (through Concordates and Protestant church treaties). Nazi school policy turned all confessional schools into *German* common schools (*Deutsche* Gemeinschaftsschulen), as distinct from former liberal Gemeinschaftsschulen, emphasising the national and “race” aspect. The overall educational aim of the NS leaders was to achieve a fundamental shift from the traditional ethos of education (Erziehung), including knowledge transmission and supporting cultural “Bildung” as individual personal development, towards an ethos of “youth guidance”, analogous to the NS youth organisations of Hitler Youth, focusing on methods of creating “community experience” and charismatic leadership, seen as “real life” in contrast to bookish knowledge. The school system, however, was - not so much ideologically, but structurally - opposed to all ambitions of creating or promising “paradise-like” conditions, which contributed to its marginal role in the NS propaganda (Leschinsky, 2000, 127ff.).

After World War II, the elementary schools (“Volksschulen”) in the Western part of Germany resumed their confessional status, but during the 1960s, due to a growing religious mixture in the big cities, transformed to “Christliche Gemeinschaftsschulen” in most federal states, that is, they were based on general Christian principles, combining Catholic and Protestant traditions. According to Article 7.3. of the Grundgesetz, all state schools are defined as “Christian Common Schools” (“Christliche Gemeinschaftsschulen”) in a broad sense of the word. Apart from those schools, there are explicitly “Confessional schools”, where churches are the management bodies as well as independent schools (explicitly “Non-confessional” schools) (Roeder, 1994).

In the Eastern part of Germany, the “Volksschule” and successive tripartite school system was abolished, and a ten-year common school for all children was introduced (“Polytechnische Oberschule”, POS), consisting of three stages. The children remained in their class group during the whole period of 10 years, similar to the West-German “Gesamtschule”, but without its concept of internal differentiation. In the late 1940s, a process of stalinisation started (as twenty years before in the Soviet Union), strictly devaluing all educational reform approaches which initially played a crucial role in socialist thinking. By integrating education totally into the political system, the independent institutional dynamics of school as an area of socialisation eluding state control was to be abolished. School as an institution effecting certain *non-deliberate influences on socialisation*, apart from its official educational aims (Leschinsky, 2000, p.129), was seen as contrasting with state plans of consistently connecting thinking and political acting from an early age onwards (von Kopp, 1983). The preschool was thus an administrative part of the educational system.

2. Legal and constitutional framework

2.1. Basic rights to religious freedom

The *Grundgesetz* of 1949 (Basic Law = Constitution) of the Federal Republic of Germany guarantees the civil right of freedom of belief and conscience and freedom of creed, religious or ideological, as well as the undisturbed practice of religion.

Article 4 (Freedom of faith, conscience, and creed)⁴

(1) Freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, shall be inviolable.

(2) The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed.

(3) No person shall be compelled against his conscience to render military service involving the use of arms. Details shall be regulated by a federal law.

⁴ Translated by Inter Nationes, cf. <http://www.iuscomp.org/gla/statutes/GG.htm>.

This is legally realised by a system of coordination rather than separation between churches and state. Religious Education is legally called “*res mixta*”, a legally mixed affair of the state and of the religious communities in most federal states (cf. Literature Review, 2.3).

Article 7 (School education)

(1) The entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state.

(2) Parents and guardians shall have the right to decide whether children shall receive religious instruction.

(3) Religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools, with the exception of non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the state’s right of supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned.⁵ Teachers may not be obliged against their will to give religious instruction.

(4) The right to establish private schools shall be guaranteed. Private schools that serve as alternatives to state schools shall require the approval of the State and shall be subject to the laws of the Länder. Such approval shall be given when private schools are not inferior to the state schools in terms of their educational aims, their facilities, or the professional training of their teaching staff, and when segregation of pupils according to the means of their parents will not be encouraged thereby. Approval shall be withheld if the economic and legal position of the teaching staff is not adequately assured.

(5) A private elementary school shall be approved only if the educational authority finds that it serves a special pedagogical interest or if, on the application of parents or guardians, it is to be established as a denominational or interdenominational school or as a school based on a particular philosophy and no state elementary school of that type exists in the municipality.

(6) Preparatory schools shall remain abolished.

⁵ For an interpretation from a legal perspective, see Schmoeckel, 1964. Islamic Religious Education is a denominational school subject according to Article 7.3 of the Basic Law as interpreted in the mainstream jurisprudence but is not yet taught in any German federal state. Details of the current situation are summarized by Stock (2003, 5 ff.).

Article 7.3 of the GG applies to the majority of German federal states and is legally interpreted as denominational RE, separating pupils along their church affiliation into Protestants and Catholics, except in Hamburg where there is a forum of cooperating religious communities (Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims) for integrative “Religious education for all” (cf. Literature review 2.3.), under the umbrella of the Protestant Church. There are, however, three federal states where Article 7.3 of the GG is not applied at all: Bremen, Brandenburg and Berlin, relating to the “Bremen Clause” of Grundgesetz Article 141, adopted from the Weimar Constitution. This exception was originally developed in Bremen due to confessional splits and upheavals between Lutherans and Reformed Protestants in the 19th century, which led the senate of Bremen to search for a non-denominational concept, based on common ground (in this instance, the Bible), under the control of the senate. The subject in Bremen therefore has been called “Biblical History Teaching” (Biblischer Geschichtsunterricht) for nearly 100 years (since 1916), even if it includes not only contents of the (Jewish and Christian) Bible, but also of the Qur’an and other religious traditions, related to key issues of pupils’ lifeworld.

Article 141 (“Bremen Clause”)

The first sentence of paragraph (3) of Article 7 shall not apply in any Land in which Land law was otherwise provided on January 1, 1949.

Until the 1980s, it was common to assume that the ‘religious communities’ addressed in the Grundgesetz Article 7.3 were solely the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches. However, the basic idea of the constitution is seen as providing public space for all religious and philosophical groups (Knauth, 2007, p.245), in order to allow for freedom of religious belief. These constitutional foundations are interpreted in various ways in the sixteen federal states and their federal constitutions as well as in their respective school laws (for an overview, cf. “Schulrecht” in www.bildungsserver.de).

2.2. State-church relationship

There is no State Church according to *Grundgesetz Article 140*, adopting *Article 137* of the *Weimar Constitution* (1919), but there are various state-church-treaties at the level of the federal states with the Roman Catholic Church (Vatican) and the Protestant *Landeskirchen*, deriving from the close link between former state churches and the aristocracy (according to the principle “*cuius regio - eius religio*”) before the establishment of the German nation state. The state-church-treaties differ between the various federal states and are revised continuously. They regulate the fields of cooperation between church and state, including, for example, military pastoral care, religious education at schools including teacher training at state universities and “church tax” (the collection of church membership contributions by the state via the taxation document/ *Lohnsteuerkarte* which each employer requires from any employee in order to withhold income tax prepayments).

2.3. Equality and human rights issues

This close link between churches and state is seen by the majority of German ecclesiastical lawyers as a system of coordination which guarantees a vital division of labour: the democratic German State, obliged to religious neutrality, must not create its own normative foundations but has to rely on external value resources, provided by the Christian churches (cf. von Campenhausen; Böckenförde). This interpretation of Article 140 of the GG implies a Christocentric perspective on German culture, which is not generally shared by the jurisdiction or by religious minorities. (Stock, 2003; Engin, 2001) One of the actual conflicts here lies between the *positive* right of religious freedom and its expression and the *negative* right of religious freedom in a sense of protection from religious indoctrination (as, for example, the prohibition of headscarves for Muslim teachers in public schools in Germany, arguing that students have to be protected from being indoctrinated by the political implications of this religious symbol).

Another conflict concerns all religious non-members of the churches, representing structural discrimination: there is no equivalent RE as a “regular school subject” for Muslims, Jews, Buddhists or other religious minorities yet, apart from several on-going pilot Islamic Education courses in some federal states and some instances of Jewish RE in a very small number of public schools, as this requires a “churchification” of the organisational structures which is currently taking place in

Islam (Leggewie, 1993, p.281), criticized by Muslims as “structural assimilation” (Ayubb Köhler, 1999). Thus, umbrella organisations of the heterogeneous Muslim communities and organisations of various national backgrounds have been formed to organise and represent Islamic religious practice and socio-political interests in Germany, based on the German Basic Law. (cf. Özdiil, 1999) However, it is probable that no “church-analogous” representative agency for Muslims will emerge in Germany in spite of state pressure, but rather an increasing variety of Islamic RE models in different federal states, as is the case with RE in general (Engin, 2001).

3. Primary school structure

Primary schools are the only part of the German school system organised as common schools for all children, regardless of class or ethnic background since the Weimar democratic constitution. This underlines their crucial role for social integration. Primary education aims to enable children to relate their subjective perspectives to the objective curriculum, thus expanding children’s worldview through specific cultural patterns of meaning and developing their agency within society. “Reflecting the world” in a heterogeneous⁶ school for all implies that teachers and pupils cannot rely on shared values and meanings as a matter of course, but have to develop an awareness of their respective perspectives to engage in a common process of interpretation. (Faust-Siehl/Garlichs et al., 1996, p.23)

3.1. Provision within the primary school

3.1.1. Transitions

The phase of starting school (“Schuleingangsphase”) has been widely discussed and subject to debate, for example, concerning the criteria for school admission and for support for children who are regarded as not yet “mature” enough developmentally for school (“Schuleingangsdiagnostik”). Pilot projects attempt to prevent children’s exclusion from starting school, sending them to special pre-classes or school-kindergartens (as is the case for around two to ten per cent of children every school

⁶ Excluded from this inclusive approach, however, is the separate “Sonderschule” from grade 1 onwards for children with special needs who are regarded as unable to follow the common school programme.

year, depending on the federal state), and providing integrative support services in the school (Faust-Siehl et. al., 1996, 139ff.). There are many regional attempts to build up closer links between kindergarten and primary school which are administratively separate, embodying two different approaches towards education (e.g. project *Ponte*, www.ponte-info.de).

Common school ends after four years; the transition to the secondary stage and the decision about which school type is chosen is extremely relevant to the subsequent educational trajectory of the child. Depending on the federal state, this decision is taken by the primary school teachers *or* the parents *or* - ideally - in cooperation with the children themselves, their parents and the school, as their respective criteria can be very different (Gogolin/Neumann, 1997, p.251)

3.1.2. Curriculum content

There are cross-curricular key principles like social learning, citizenship and environmental awareness, cooperation with parents and other institutions of the community and media competence, to build a bridge between more playful learning in elementary stage to more systematic methods of schools in secondary stage and to life-long learning. The main *contents* of the primary education curriculum are:

- German: Reading, writing, literacy (texts and images) and oral expression in German
- Mathematics
- Knowledge of the world (traditionally called “Sachunterricht”)
- English or other foreign language (usually without marks, mostly in grade 3-4, sometimes from grade 1, depending on the federal state)
- Arts, Handicraft
- Music
- Sports
- Religion (in most federal states).

These are taught in learning areas or subjects, but also in cross-curricular teaching and projects, focusing on themes.

Teaching methods within German primary education have shifted in recent decades away from learning through instruction to more dynamic processes, which

are more child-centred and engage with the child's whole surroundings and lifeworld (Schneider, Brügelmann and Kochan, 1990). Differentiation *within* a class has therefore become a general principle, especially in classes with a high percentage of children with mother tongues other than German, but also as a general strategy in all subjects (e.g. mathematics). The principle of internal differentiation may be supported by mixed age-groups, with older pupils helping the younger ones, thus enhancing their own competencies.

3.1.3. Extended school services

Primary school usually involves half-day provision in Germany, with a growing number of full-time schools in recent years (making up 9.9% of all primary schools in 2005). Apart from classroom teaching, several educational services are connected to the primary school, partly taking on tasks previously carried out by families, including:

- Educational assistance in intermediate hours during the school day (“verlässliche Grundschule”);
- Health promotion (in cooperation with nutrition consultation, medical services, health authorities);
- Consultation on psychological or educational issues within school (Schulpsychologischer Dienst) or in cooperation with external local services;
- After school care centre (Hort), including support with homework (fees);
- Traffic education (traffic signs, training for riding a bicycle) and crime prevention (in cooperation with the police);
- School festivals, excursions to the community or nature outings, gardening, school worship.

3.2. School management

As responsibility for school education lies with the Federal States (Länder), rather than the central government, the highest administrative governing body responsible for public and private schools is the minister of Education and Culture in each Land. The federal educational authority decides on funding resources and on the curriculum, within the framework of the educational standards of the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK, a panel consisting of all federal ministers of Education and Culture).

This curriculum is compulsory for all teachers, and its implementation has to be ensured by the school director as their principal. He or she is also responsible for the distribution of the financial budget and for the team development of staff (teaching, administrative, technical), internal communication processes between colleagues and between teachers, parents and children, as well as the school's positioning within the broader local community.

3.2.1. Shifting responsibilities

As the current political trend in Germany moves towards more administrative autonomy for each individual school ("*Schulautonomie*"), developing its individual profile ("*Schulprogramm*"), the distribution of responsibilities is currently changing: the role of educational authorities and school directors is shifting from *steering* to *moderating, supporting* and *providing a legal and educational framework*, but delegating decisions concerning school life to democratic committees. This corresponds to a growing awareness of the role of children as legal subjects (UN Convention of Children's Rights 1989) and active co-constructors of their education.

Committees and structures of democratic participation in primary schools include:

- Parents' Conference (consisting of elected parents' representatives of all classes);
- Teachers' Conference (consisting of all teachers);
- School's Conference (the chief decision-making body of the school, consisting of equal numbers of teachers, parents and pupils plus the director, discussing the school profile and programme);
- Class speakers (elected representatives of the pupils of each class);
- Class councils (pupil councils, a weekly meeting of all pupils within a class, led by pupils, supported by the class teacher, e.g. by writing minutes);
- Pupils' parliament (a monthly meeting of all class speakers of a school);
- School enterprises (self-organised educational projects of pupils, producing and selling their products, during their leisure time, with the support of the school, contributing to the school programme) (Garlichs et. al., 1996; Eikel/de Haan, 2007).

However, in spite of the wide range of institutionalised formal participation rights for parents and pupils, their practice within the German school system has a tendency to

formalize and to abstract from individual situations, thus excluding many parents and pupils (Hendricks 2006). The inclusion of immigrant parents requires intercultural and often multi-lingual competence, and generally questions the norm of the “mono-lingual school” (Gogolin/Neumann, 1997).

3.2.2. Funding

Most primary schools are public and financed completely by the state (the federal state and local community). The percentage of private schools in the primary school sector is even lower than that of private schools as a whole in the German school system: in 2005, two per cent of pupils attended private primary schools, according to the Kultusministerkonferenz 2007 (KMK, 2007; cf. Literature Review 2.2.). According to the Basic Law Articles 7.4 and 7.5, the federal states shall not allow private primary schools, apart from in exceptional cases. However, the percentage of private schools - mostly church schools - is rising, and some federal states (e.g. Northern Rhine Westphalia) are improving the access of private schools to public funding. In this context, there has been an “elite-school” debate.

4. Curriculum for religious education

The RE curriculum is – as with the curricula of all other school subjects - a matter for the federal educational authorities. Therefore it varies between the Länder, according to the model of RE: in the majority of the Länder, it is developed in a cooperation between church and state. This means that the respective church develops the curriculum by cooperating with the educational authority in a joint Curriculum Commission (Lehrplankommission). The educational authority needs the authorization of the religious community for the curriculum in those federal states where GG Article 7.3 is applied (cf. Literature Review 2.3.).

All RE curricula in Germany, however, draw on a combination of the Christian faith tradition, existential themes of the children’s lifeworld and non-Christian religious traditions as part of the contents to be taught (with different emphases). A major difference between the denominational and the non-denominational RE models lies in the *religious or non-religious character of the teaching* itself: only Catholic denominational RE would regard it as an educational

goal to prepare children for sacraments, such as Confession or Communion, or to not only inform them about but also celebrate prayers from the Catholic tradition, due to the principle of “trias” (the homogeneous composition of the class regarding the denomination of the teacher, pupils and lesson contents, cf. Literature Review 2.3.). However, organising encounters with a variety of religious traditions, in combination with creative forms of inclusive services for all children, is part of school culture, independently from the respective form of RE, leaving out any wording which may have an exclusive character for some of the religious or non-religious traditions present in the children’s families, developing or discovering common forms of worship or meditation (cf. Literature Review 2.).

The process of writing RE curricula and the concrete composition of the Curriculum Commission has not to date been publicly transparent, but usually takes place without teachers’, parents’ or pupils’ participation at an internal administrative level. The above mentioned democratisation processes in the whole culture of school management might change this situation in the future, facilitated by public discussions on Islamic RE. The composition of any Lehrplankommission for Islamic RE is published in the media, in contrast to its Christian counterparts.

Flexibility of curriculum across schools is possible within the curricular framework which usually leaves space for the respective contexts of schools in different surroundings. Transcending this framework, however, raises the problem of educational standards. Since RE is relevant for moving up to the next grade when it is marked (in many Länder from grade 3 onwards; Hecht, 1999), educational standards have to be comparable across schools.

The role of private church schools (80% of all private schools) is ambivalent here: the culture of involvement of parents and pupils is stronger than in state schools, as they are “customers”, most of whom are actively engaged in school life and its development (which is an admission criterion for the schools in selecting families). In addition, there is a well-developed culture of individual support for pupils with academic difficulties or social problems. The issue of belonging to *this* school, related to a specific school philosophy, is usually more valued in private schools than in public schools (Hendricks, 2007). Religious differences are treated respectfully, with provision for various different forms of RE. However, the effect is a further fragmentation of society, and the danger of losing any connection to the majority of German society which is more heterogeneous.

RE generally takes place in schools, as it is funded by the state, even in the case of Berlin, where the state is not responsible for funding church RE teachers and their training, but it does provide free classrooms for denominational church RE.

5. Teacher preparation⁷

RE teachers are mainly organised in denominational associations (AEED: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Evangelischer Erzieher in Deutschland; BKKR: Bundeskonferenz katholischer Religionslehrerverbände). Teachers in federal states with non-denominational RE form their own associations (e.g. Aktionsgemeinschaft Biblische Geschichte/Religionskunde in Bremen, Gesprächskreis Interreligiöser Religionsunterricht in Hamburg).

RE teachers have been interviewed as part of several qualitative studies conducted by RE university departments (cf. Literature Review 2.4.1.). The detailed “Lower Saxony-Study” (Feige, Dressler, Lukatis and Schöll, 2001) on the professional biographies of Catholic and Protestant RE teachers (primary to grammar school) specifies three different types of teachers:

Type A: attribute great significance to the religious institution (church) for their own religious practice, which also influences his or her way of teaching RE (making up a minority of teachers interviewed).

Type B: have an individualized interpretation of their traditional denominational heritage, and see individuals as agents of their own biography, self-monitoring, with occasional access to church services (depending on their life situation) (making up the majority of all teachers interviewed).

Type C: is strongly oriented in personal experience, which draws only on religious traditions where they are seen as useful (= only 1 person).

The observed tension between religious institutions and their traditional heritage on the one hand and individual interpretation on the other hand among the majority of the RE teachers requires self reflection on their own religious biography as well as de-

⁷ Further details on teacher education are provided in the Literature review 2.4.

and re-constructing the religious traditions. This is summarised by the authors as a decisive qualification for educational interaction with young people regarding religious traditions: neither completely identifying nor separating from institutional religious traditions facilitates the inclusion and encouragement of a pupil's own critical and self-reflective engagement with religion.

Research on the non-denominational provision of the new school subject LER (Life Questions - Ethics - Religion) in Brandenburg (in the former GDR) in the context of a long-term study over 7 years between 1992 (the year of the introduction of this subject as a pilot venture) and 1999 (where it was established as a regular subject in secondary schools, with the introduction of marks) has shown that the subject has become very popular among teachers and pupils. Eighty-six per cent of the teachers interviewed are not members of any church or religious community (Gruehn, Thebis, 2001, p.39); most of them are motivated to teach LER by their personal interest in the new subject which they regard as an important extension of the traditional subjects, especially the humanities, but no-one was found to be motivated by any resentment towards denominational RE. The teachers feel confident in their role, especially concerning the L and E aspect of the subject, with some uncertainties remaining concerning the "R" ("Religion") aspect. Issues dealing explicitly with religion (like festivals or informations on different religious traditions) are less popular among the pupils than issues in the "L" or "E" area, thus producing a dilemma for the teachers' didactic principle of "child centredness". (ibid., p.59) However, many of the issues under "L" or "E" are classical themes within denominational RE (e.g. prejudices/immigrants, friendship/love, sects/esoteric/occultism, happiness/meaning in life), and the profile of a specific LER pedagogy (as distinct from denominational RE, which can either be combined with LER or selected without LER) is still in process. In 2004, the Minister of Education for the first time issued a framework curriculum of LER for primary schools. Gruehn and Thebis concluded from their long-term research results that a clear focus on learning about religion and religious differences (religionskundliches Wissen), embedded in a systematic educational concept of integrated L-E-R components, will contribute to an easing of the competition between RE and LER, in a sense of educational shared work.

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