Theo-Web. Academic Journal of Religious Education
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Editorial and Summary in English
by
Manfred L. Pirner

1.   What's new in "Theo-Web"?

This issue 2010-1 of our online-journal "Theo-Web. Academic Journal of Religious Education" marks two decisive steps in its development.

First, the editors have decided to give the journal a more *international concept*. To this end, we have institutionalized three major changes:

1) The introductory web site is now also available in English (see: www.theo-web.de/english) providing all the general information about the journal and inviting potential contributors from countries outside the German-speaking nations to submit manuscripts in English.

2) This is further supported by offering the "guidelines for manuscripts" in English and by appointing one of the editors, Manfred L. Pirner, as the responsible editor for contributions in English.

3) In order to make the major contents of the German contributions known to an international readership, all future issues will include an "Editorial and Summary of the Issue in English" like this one. It seemed to us that such an additional overview of the journal's articles is more profitable to international English-speaking readers than additional English *abstracts* at the beginning of each German article. The summaries given in the English editorial are intended to convey more of the contents of the articles than the abstracts do and to take into special consideration the different cultural background of an international readership often not familiar with German institutions, social structures or academic discourses. For those articles which are originally in English, the summary will consist mainly of the abstract given at the beginning of the text.

Of course, we appreciate any reactions and comments by readers from outside the German language context on our new concept 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).

Second, as a measure of quality assurance a *two-track review process* has been introduced. The contributions of thematic issues as well as documentations of conferences are reviewed by the responsible editors; articles under the general category of "Research and Discourse" have to undergo a double blind peer review, which means that submitted manuscripts are anonymously sent to at least two peers whose identity also remains unknown to the author of the manuscript when he receives their feedback.

This edition of "Theo-Web" contains two thematic (sub-)issues, one on "E-Learning in the context of Religious Education" (with six articles) and the other on "Teachers' values and their professionality at faith schools" (with eight articles, documenting a research symposium on the topic that took place at the beginning of March at the

University of Erlangen-Nuremberg). Apart from the two thematic parts there are four articles under the general category of "Research and Discourse".

2. Thematic Issue "E-Learning in the context of Religious Education"

"From e-learning to blended learning: current developments and didactic chances of virtual forms of teaching and learning" (original: German)
by ULRICH IBERER

Ulrich Iberer opens the issue with an overview of the recent developments in e-learning approaches and methods. In his view, the initial enthusiasm concerning IT-based learning has given way to a more sober and realistic realization of the pros and cons of e-learning. He emphasizes that e-learning is not a method of inherent quality but rather requires high-quality didactic and methodical approaches which help to profit from its advantages and to compensate its disadvantages. In particular, e-learning settings have to adapt to the specific learning tasks, structures and groups of learners. The most important development seems to be the increasing convergence of face-to-face learning and e-learning into various forms of "blended learning". Again, however, Iberer points out that blended learning also must show specific qualities beyond just being an additive combination of two categories of learning. He argues that the most important of these specific qualities can be found in the fields of systemic equilibrium, variation, focusing, group learning, integration of systemic surroundings and inclusion of management and innovation aspects. At the end of his article, Iberer sketches some principles for successful didactic strategies in blended learning, in particular drawing on a system-theory perspective which emphasizes the interactions between e-learning and its various environments.
Dr Ulrich Iberer, Lecturer at the Institute of Educational Management at the University of Education, Ludwigsburg, Germany

"What is 'good' e-learning?" (original: German)
by MARTIN SANDER-GAISER

Sander-Gaiser advances fundamental deliberations on the specific qualities and chances of e-learning from a religious education perspective. Starting off by describing the way in which computer and internet have become a normal part in almost all young people's lives, he points out the consequences this has for students' learning, but also for their conception of spirituality. Web 2.0 enables people to easily develop their own individual and syncretistic spirituality from world-wide resources and countless options – a kind of "open-source spirituality", largely detached from traditional religious institutions. According to Sander-Gaiser, most of the teachers in schools belong to a different generation of internet users (Web 1.0) and find it difficult to catch up with current developments in the digital world. He sees the challenge for RE in conceptualizing e-learning on the ground of a theological theory of education and learning which he tries to establish by drawing on Vygotsky's "Activity Theory". On this basis he arrives at seven indicators of quality for e-learning: Stimulating communication, promoting a positive social learning climate, designing activities in situational contexts, offering flexible and rich surrounding resources, supporting effectiveness of work, promoting individual paths and speeds of learning, and enhancing community activities.
Dr Martin Sander-Gaiser, Senior Lecturer at Göttingen University and at the Pedagogical-theological Institute of the Protestant Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, Germany

"Biblical didactics online. How information and communication technologies support an understanding of the Bible" (original: German),
by DANIEL SCHÜTTLÖFFEL

In his article Daniel Schüttlöffel investigates and evaluates internet sites suitable for biblical learning. Starting from current theories of biblical learning in religious education discourse, he defines eight fields of biblical learning and chooses four of them to function as heuristic perspectives for his internet research:

1) Internet sites can *present* biblical texts. This does not only mean that several different translations of the Bible are offered but also some, if few, special children's bibles with illustrations or cartoons. The quality of what these offer is, however, mostly not high.

2) Internet sites can help to *convey and consolidate basic knowledge* about the Bible and its historical context, especially in the form of quiz-like games. However, many of them, Schüttlöffel finds, are not well reflected upon didactically, e.g. concerning the choice of knowledge items and their context of meaning.

3) Some internet sites offer material on *the Bible's history of impact,* which enables the user to address the biblical text on a theory-of-reception basis (e.g. sites that show biblical art).

4) What Schüttlöffel does not find on the internet are sites supportive of an *existential and theological interpretation and understanding of the Bible.* For this field of biblical learning, he advances his own creative suggestions on how to use the web and the PC to this end. He encourages his readers, for instance, to understand the internet as a forum of a huge variety of interpretations and to offer wikis in which users can enter their own personal interpretation of a certain biblical text; he suggests using the computer to work with methods of "interactional Bible interpretation"; and in the context of Gerd Theißen's concept of an "open biblical didactic" he argues for using the hyperlink structure of the internet to find and create links between the Bible and today's life world.

Dr Daniel Schüttlöffel, primary school teacher in Neustadt am Rübenberge, Germany

"Web-based teaching and learning in theology. The e-learning module Biblical Studies of the Virtual University of Bavaria" (original: German)
by LUKAS BORMANN

The universities of Germany's southeastern federal state of Bavaria have established a common network of e-learning programmes named "Virtual University of Bavaria" (vhb). In his contribution, Lukas Bormann introduces a programme for Biblical Studies in the vhb that he has developed. In the first part, Bormann gives an interesting overview of the research into and development of e-learning in general, at universities and in theological contexts. In his conclusion of the first part, he particularly emphasizes the importance of online-tutoring (or online-coaching). Its quality is today regarded as being one of the most relevant factors for the success of e-learning programmes at university. This is why the concept of online-tutoring is so prominent in Bormann's own Bible Studies programme that he sketches in the second part of his article. The course offers basic biblical knowledge which is required as a foundation for academic studies in Theology (in German: "Bibelkunde") and finishes with a written paper. The course, which covers the whole Bible in one semester, was especially developed for students of religious education who want to become teachers, because in their studies they have to acquire Bible knowledge in a short time. On www.utb.mehr-wissen.de the author offers an exemplary trial module.

Dr Lukas Bormann, Professor of New Testament at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

"Online supported learning at school, university and in vocational training – 5 times added value" (original: German)

by JULIA BORN

Since 2002 the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has been operating an internet platform named "rpi-virtuell" (meaning: virtual institute of religious education), which is free for religious education teachers and virtually everyone engaged in educational work in schools, churches and beyond (www.rpi-virtuell.net). Julia Born is one of the major managers of this platform. In her article she shows how online supported learning (OSL) can improve the quality of learning processes. The notion of "online supported learning" was coined by the rpi-group in order to avoid the rather narrow collocations of "e-learning" which tend to overemphasize the electronic media and instructional approaches. Instead, the rpi concept underlines the various ways in which electronic communication can enrich and improve "real-life" forms and settings of teaching and learning. Especially, rpi-virtuell aims at improving religious education at school, which in Germany is a normal school subject at all state schools. On rpi-virtuell teachers can e.g. create their own virtual "classrooms" and have their students communicate with them or among each other in forums and by uploading material.

Julia Born identifies the "added value" that rpi-virtuell offers for learning processes in five main areas: It can promote individual and cooperative learning, it can open up new ways of gaining access to learning, it can support a competence-oriented approach to learning, it is particularly helpful for the documentation of learning processes and their results, also allowing for new forms of evaluation, and, of course, it enhances the development of media competence. All these advantages of OSL are unfolded with respect to school education and adult education settings. Born concludes by pointing to the fact that Germany, being one of the strongest economies in Europe, still has to catch up with many other nations when it comes to digital learning in schools. Obviously, competent and intelligent ways of dealing with digital media have up to now not been dominant objectives of school education. It is high time, Born argues, that schools and teacher training discover how much teaching and learning can profit from of OSL as a new dimension of learning.

Julia Born, manager and editor of the learning platform "rpi-virtuell", run by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)

"'I appreciate both forms of learning.' Empirical evaluation of an online seminar" (original: German).

by SANDRA BRÖHL and MARTIN ROTHGANGEL

The authors have conducted illuminating empirical research on the effectiveness of e-learning on the learning platform "rpi-virtuell" which they document in their article The course they evaluated was on Martin Luther and had been offered in the context of a series of online-programmes designed for religious educators in schools and in congregational confirmation work. In their pilot study Bröhl and Rothgangel asked the 15 participants on this online course to fill in two questionnaires, one in an early phase of the course in order to learn about the participants' expectations, and one in the final phase in order to find out if expectations had been met and which factors contributed to a positive or a negative evaluation of the seminar by the participants. On the whole, the results show that all the participants thought they had completely or partly achieved their personal seminar objectives and had been successful learners. Asked about the advantages of the method of e-learning, participants pointed out the flexibility and autonomy of learning as well as obligatory text production tasks. Interactive and communicative processes were also much

appreciated; e.g. every participant had to draft a lesson outline which was put online and commented on by the other participants. Asked to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning, all participants but one arrived at a positive record in favour of e-learning. Also, there was a positive development in the participants' attitude toward e-learning from the beginning to the end of the course. Still, the appreciation of e-learning is not accompanied by a devaluation of face-to-face-learning. As one participant put it: "I appreciate both forms of learning." All in all the study reveals encouraging results, which also give valuable hints as to which factors can enhance the quality of e-learning programmes.

Sandra Bröhl, graduate of Göttingen University

Dr Martin Rothgangel, Professor of Religious Education, University of Vienna (formerly of Göttingen University)

3rd Thematic Issue "Teachers' values and their professionality at faith schools"

As indicated above, this thematic issue represents the documentation of the papers given at an international research symposium held on 1st and 2nd March 2010 at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. It was introduced by the following text:

"Research on the role and the self-concept of teachers at faith schools is scarce, not only in Germany. Still, it seems plausible to suggest that teachers' commitment to certain values contributes to the distinctive profiles of such schools. Also, the mechanisms of staff recruitment or self-selection of teachers e.g. at church-based private schools are largely unclear. Another deficit in the research into faith schools is the lack of exchange and discussion across denominations or religions, across European and non-European countries and between scholars and school principals.

The question whether there are significant correlations between teachers' value commitments in connection with their religious world views on the one hand and their professional thinking and acting on the other – a question so vital for faith schools – bears relevance for all schools. In the empirical research on teachers' professionality such correlations have sometimes been discussed but have rarely been investigated. For instance, whether or not a teacher's Christian, Muslim or clearly atheistic belief has any influence on their educational and didactical concept and practice is a question which cannot be answered on empirical grounds.

The symposium addresses these questions. To this end, it brings together experts from different academic disciplines, from different countries and from different denominations. Its aim is to find out about the present state of research, to clarify questions of research methodology, to develop promising research perspectives and to critically discuss one concrete research project plan.

The symposium is organized by the Chair of General Educational Science (Professor Dr Annette Scheunpflug) and the Chair of Religious Education (Professor Dr Manfred L. Pirner) at the Friedrich-Alexander-University of Erlangen-Nuremberg together with the Academic Institute on Protestant Schools, run by the Evangelical Church in Germany (directed by Dr Uta Hallwirth)."

Teachers at Faith Schools in England and Wales: State of research (original: English)

by LESLIE J. FRANCIS and MANDY ROBBINS

This study begins by distinguishing between three kinds of 'faith schools' (known as schools with a religious character) within England and Wales. Secondly, it draws attention to and summarises a quantitative research tradition established in 1982 concerned with identifying the attitudes and values of teachers working specifically within Anglican faith schools within the state-maintained sector, and with modelling the influence of personal and religious factors in shaping their attitudes. Thirdly, this study reanalyses a new database profiling the views of subject leaders in religious education across a broad range of primary schools with a religious character in England. These new analyses demonstrate the different priorities given to different aims of religious education by teachers in this sector, and illustrate the relative influence of personal factors (age, sex and church attendance), professional factors (years teaching, qualifications, and continuing professional development) and contextual factors (type of school).

Dr Leslie J Francis, PhD DLitt ScD DD, Professor of Religions and Education within the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, and Canon Theologian of Bangor Cathedral, Wales; Dr Mandy Robbins, is Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Education, University of Warwick

Do Religious School Teachers Take Their Faith to Work? Research Evidence from the United States (original: English)

by DAVID SIKKINK

This review draws on research on U.S. schools, especially religious schools, to understand the importance of value orientations for teaching practices, and the various ways that values and religious identities and cultures influence the professional lives of teachers. It finds evidence that religious and value orientations influence teachers to sacralize the teaching profession through a sense of religious calling to teaching and the use of classroom space. To a limited extent, these orientations influence pedagogy and curricular emphases. Value orientations seem most clearly to contribute to an ethic of personalism, including an extended teacher role, and a commitment to holistic relationships and the school community.

Dr David Sikkink, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, United States

The connection of teachers' beliefs, concerns and ideals to the normative claims of religiously affiliated schools in the Netherlands (original: English)

by THEO VAN DER ZEE

Teachers can be expected to contribute significantly to their school's orientations and goals. Presumably, the contemporary contexts of pluralism, individualism and secularisation cause teachers at religiously affiliated schools to experience conflicts regarding their schools' normative claims.

Based on recent and current research on teachers at religiously affiliated schools in the Netherlands, this article probes what exactly these conflicts involve, who causes them and how teachers handle conflicts that arise.

Findings provide evidence that the conflicts do not appear that much between teachers and their school, but more within teachers themselves, regarding the achievement or non-achievement of personal goals in their work. Findings are discussed with respect to finding a new balance between the individual (teacher) and

the collective (the school), and to future research on teachers at religiously affiliated schools.

Dr Theo van der Zee, Deputy manager and senior researcher, Institute for Catholic Education, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Teachers at Christian schools in German-speaking countries. On the state of research (original: German)

by MANFRED L. PIRNER, ANNETTE SCHEUNPFLUG and ANKE HOLL

The article starts with an outline of the high expectations which can be found in official church documents and school mission statements regarding teachers at Christian schools. Behind most of such expectations a background theory emerges that states connections between the teachers' personal religious belief and their educational practice. Up to now, however, there has been very little empirical evidence in the German context of such connections. The authors set out to summarize the very few empirical studies in this field: A quantitative enquiry among the educational staff of the non-denominational German Christian youth charity "Christliches Jugenddorfwerk" (CJD), a quantitative study of the profile of Protestant private schools in Austria, and a qualitative study of the teachers' self-concept at several Protestant private schools in Germany.

The results of the studies are not unequivocal. On the one hand, the school's Christian orientation does not seem to be very important in the view of most of the teachers; they rather emphasize general educational values such as tolerance, good relations between teachers and students, or community-building. On the other hand, there is evidence that propositions from Christian faith such as the Christian image of man, the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself, or the idea that all people are equal before God are felt by the teachers to be significant for their educational work – even by a number of non-believing teachers. The results also indicate that it is necessary in empirical research to differentiate between various types of religiosity among Christian teachers, between various aspects and dimensions of pedagogical work that might be connected with the teachers' religious orientations, and between several types of Christian schools which may influence connections between religiosity and teacher professionality. The authors conclude that a lot of research work still needs to be done.

Dr Manfred L. Pirner, Professor of Religious Education at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany
Dr Annette Scheunpflug, Professor of General Educational Science at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany
Anke Holl, doctoral candidate at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, and director of a Christian school

On the relevance of teachers' values for their professionality – a profession-research perspective (original: German)

by SIGRID BLÖMEKE

The article presents evidence that the profession of the school teacher implies a high degree of ethical and moral challenges which can be identified in teachers' concrete every-day activity. The author gives examples from two current empirical studies in which teaching situations in class are analyzed and discussed with the teachers. The analyses reveal the ways in which teachers deal with ethically relevant problems and conflicts in class, and it shows by which professional-ethical attitudes these teachers are guided. It becomes clear that the main problems are not the teachers' deficits in ethical attitudes, but rather their limited ability to put these attitudes into practice in

specific situations and under the pressure to act in class. Consequently, what is needed to improve teacher professionality is not so much further reflection on how to develop teachers' professional ethics but rather programmes to support their competence to act adequately in different ethically relevant classroom situations. To this end, the author recommends, among others, forms of peer consultation or *lesson labs* that concentrate on the micro level of classroom activity.

Dr Sigrid Blömeke, Professor of Systematic Didactics and Classroom Research, Humboldt-University in Berlin

Teachers at Protestant schools – what do we know and what do we want to know? A statement (original: German)

by UTA HALLWIRTH

Teachers at Protestant schools are regarded as guaranteeing to a substantial degree the implementation of a Christian school profile. But little is known about their professional self-concept and their religious orientation. Neither do we know for sure if teachers' endorsement of Christian values has any impact on their everyday educational activity. The author argues that it is therefore necessary to research into the teachers' motives, their convictions and their educational objectives, but also into aspects such as pedagogical optimism or job satisfaction. In addition, it would be helpful to learn if a Protestant school ethos has any repercussions on the teachers.

Dr Uta Hallwirth, Director of the Academic Institute on Protestant Schools in the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)

Teachers at Catholic schools – what do we know and what do we want to know? A statement (original: German)

by ECKHARD NORDHOFEN

The article starts with the perception that Christian schools are mostly associated with Christian values. In contrast, the author emphasizes that values are only a profitable side effect of Christianity. Its real quality leap in the history of religions, he argues, is rather rooted in its concept of God and the consequent new way of looking at man and the world. This is the reason why for the profile of Catholic schools and teachers, religious anchoring is more important than value orientation. With their concept of "fermentation" Catholic schools try to integrate aspects of such a religious anchoring on a medium level e.g. in class material or teacher handbooks.

Dr Eckhard Nordhofen, Honorary Professor and Director of the Education Department of the Diocese of Limburg, Germany

Evaluation of denominational schools on the basis of "Perception- and Value-oriented School Development" (WWSE) (original: German)

by KLAUS WILD

In the first part of the article, the author introduces the concept of "Perception- and Value-oriented School Development" (WWSE) which he has developed and tested over the past years. It has been implemented as a system of evaluation at Protestant and Catholic private schools in Bavaria as well as in numerous state schools. Preliminary insights from the evaluation of more than 370 schools are provided and questions for further research are raised.

Dr Klaus Wild, Director of the educational department and the Institute of School Development at the Protestant School Foundation in Bavaria

4. Research and Discourse

Under this heading Theo-Web publishes articles on various topics of academic research and discourse in the field of religious education. The contributions in this part are unsolicited manuscripts which have successfully undergone a double blind peer review process.

Taking the students into account instead of distancing them from religion.
A response to Juergen Heumann
by CHRISTIAN GRETHLEIN
In the last issue of Theo-Web Juergen Heumann advanced a fervent plea against prayer in the classroom. He argues that this practice is pedagogically irresponsible and attacks Christian Grethlein as one major advocate of prayers in class.

In his response, Grethlein criticizes Heumann's article for not grasping the complexity of the prayer issue in either the pedagogical or the theological or the philosophy of science perspective. In a multi-perspective framework he sets out substantial arguments for regarding praying as a core competence within the educational objective of "enabling students for a Christian life". Students should be given the chance of getting to know religion as a living practice which comprises cognitive, affective and pragmatic dimensions. Grethlein emphasizes that this should happen in a way that takes the young people into account and guarantees their freedom to develop their own attitude towards prayer and religion: Students should learn how to pray, so that they know how to do it if or when they wish to – this, Grethlein argues, is a substantial part of religious education. In his view, this 'praying competence' is an important objective of RE which does not, however, necessarily imply that in every RE group prayer is practised. In this didactic perspective, prayer education should not be seen as "church in school" – as Heumann polemically put it – but takes the students and the context of public school education into account.
Dr Christian Grethlein, Professor of Practical Theology with an emphasis on Religious Education, University of Münster, Germany

Why education needs religion. Interventions by Religious Pedagogy in times of controversial educational policies
by MIRJAM SCHAMBECK
The article starts with a look at present developments in school education. It sheds a critical light on tendencies of economization and instrumentalization of education. Drawing on the philosopher Juergen Habermas and the educationist Juergen Baumert, the author advances her major arguments why education needs religion. First, a humane society is dependent on the potential of humanity which lies in religion; religions hold potentials in the fields of language, meaning and rationality which can help society to preserve a 'sense of humanity'. Second, religion offers one of the anthropologically elementary approaches to reality – called "constitutive rationality" by Baumert – which cannot be neglected in public education.
On this basis, Schambeck suggests conceptualizing religious education at school as a subject in which students are supported in developing their own individual, well-reflected attitude towards religion. As the centre of this concept she identifies the question about God and its relevance for the individual and society. It is this question which in Schambeck's view constitutes the difference between RE and all other school subjects and makes it indispensable for public education.

Dr Mirjam Schambeck sf, Professor of Religious Education at the University of Bamberg, Germany

On the impact of art in the Church community context. Evidence from a qualitative empirical study

by CLAUDIA GÄRTNER

Pictures are highly valued in present religious education. They are seen to play an important role in processes of religious learning. However, there is almost no empirical research on their various functions and significance in such processes. In her article, the author reports about a study, in which she interviewed several members of a Church congregation on impacts that current works of art had on them. One result is that the competence to perceive the coherence of different picture elements accounts for much of the impact the pictures have on their beholders.

Dr Claudia Gärtner, Senior Lecturer for Catholic Theology and its Didactics, University of Münster

How can differences between stages of psychological development be identified? Heuristic perspectives for the investigation of the development of religiosity in qualitative research

by ERICH NESTLER

The author develops heuristic perspectives with the help of the notions "change/development", "identity/difference" and "level". He aims at providing help for conducting qualitative empirical research on the development of religiosity in the context of schools. On the theoretical level, he tries to use as few propositions as possible in order to make investigations easier. Also, he argues against using fixed stages of religious development as absolute reference points for research but rather wants to prefer relative reference points, which means comparing two or more students with each other rather than categorizing them into a predetermined system of categories. This idea is illustrated with a video project conducted by students in a Protestant RE class at a vocational school.

Dr Erich Nestler, Extraordinary Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg