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Development of media and methodology for interreligious learning - Development of theoretical and empirical framework

Theoretical framework:
Our project is rooted in modern activity theory (Engeström et al.) and cultural psychology (Cole et al.). We understand intercultural and interreligious learning as transformation of (social) activity. For learning in authentic cultural settings, we refer to situated learning (Lave et al.) We want to integrate this theoretical orientation in the ongoing German debate around competence orientated learning in religious education (Rothgangel/Fischer, Obst et al.). This discussion has been adopted by the German ministries of education and their curricula (Klieme et al.). Learning here, is rooted in a competence model of religion (Hemel et al.) as well as the applicability and verification of learning outcomes.

On the methodological side, we orientate therefore in collaborative and computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) as well as research on religious learning in authentic cultural contexts for RE (Sander-Gaiser, Hanisch, et al.).

Social background:
PISA shows, that western Germany has a lack of integration, especially concerning pupils from Turkish background. Most of the German public media (80%) report about Islam critically producing rather a social climate of fear and intolerance. They ignore mostly the peaceful representation of Islam in the Hanafitic, Sunni tradition in Turkey, which are shared by the majority of the Islamic immigrants in Germany. On the other side, we see the growth of Jewish communities, mainly from immigrants from earlier soviet-union. As a result we have social and cultural-religious clashes – especially between younger pupils – based on cultural and religious prejudices in special regions (e.g Hamburg, Kassel).

Schools in those regions ("focal point schools") are an important starting-point in our project, as well as their local social network, which has to ensure learning in authentic interreligious contexts.

Media:
There was a long-lasting lack of appropriate materials (texts and especially pictures) in Germany fitting educational and dialogical needs as well as criteria of the academic study of religions. At the

University of Hanover a new "authentic-voice"-approach was designed placing youngsters in the middle of a unit on the theme Judaism, Buddhism and so on (Meyer): The authentic voices of youngsters (represented in slideshows, small videos, interviews, texts of worksheets etc,) are intended to foster the beginning of a dialogue on the level of the kids and teens. This is possible even in those classes with pupils without a clearly shaped commitment.

Next to a dialogue, the material fosters the own research of girls and boys about religions in the region of their school. In internet (www.weltreligionen.mobi), youngsters have the opportunity to upload their own interviews, audios, pictures and texts about religious classmates/youngsters in their town (Meyer in cooperation with www.rpi-virtuell.de , starting February 2009).

This is the very beginning. Because the materials are just published at the end of 2008/ 2009 little is known about the actual effects of the "authentic-voice"-material, especially in collaborative learning leading to participation in a culture of understanding other religions. The connections of methods and media need continuing research and further developments.

Aim
The following aims are intended:
- developing of competences in RE for participation in a culture of dialog, tolerance and religious understanding, through the use of media and methods in the perspective of learning as social actvity/participation.
- developing methodology and theoretical framework through empirical research in classrooms;
- gaining experience with the "authentic-voice"-media and evaluate teaching processes with it;
- gaining experience with setting up social networks around schools to ensure situated learning experiences.
- initiate the creation of further materials and media with/by pupils (!) from different backgrounds in the classroom/ in the RE-groups;
- developing digital learning objects and print media for CSCSL.

Methods of classroom evaluation
After the selection of 30 pilot-classrooms and after the evaluation of the anthropological background of tolerance and common values of thoughts (= pretest) we will test the influence of interreligious learning by "authentic-voice"-material concerning tolerance and common values.

We will create two different units for teaching pupils concerning interreligious learning on the basis of "authentic-voice"-material. For comparision we also create two different units with respect to interreligious learning on the basis of a "traditional" schoolbook:

- 6 classes will have religious education on the basis of the "authentic-voice"-material including digital support like rpi-virtuell and CSCL.

- 6 classes will have religious education on the basis of the "authentic-voice"-material without digital support like rpi-virtuell and CSCL.

- 6 classes will have religious education on the basis of "traditional" material (without the "authentic-voice"-material) including digital support like rpi-virtuell and CSCL.

- 6 classes will have religious education on the basis of "traditional" material (without the "authentic-voice"-material) without digital support like rpi-virtuell and CSCL.

- 6 classes have no special input, they are "control classes".

After the last lesson (post - test) und again three months later (follow up - test) we will test the influence of these different strategies to develop representations of tolerance and common values. We will take the same questionnaire as in the beginning and additional questions about the experience with the media.

Finally, we want to get additional informations about the development of further material and media with a special questionnaire for the teachers of the pilot-classrooms.

Participants in Germany:
- University of Göttingen
- Pedagogical, Theological Institute in Kassel,
- 10 selected schools in Lower Saxony und Hessen (Federal States of Gemany).
- Virtual Institute of religious education of the Protestant Church of Germany (www.rpi-virtuell.de)

Göttingen on 2. Jan. 2009

Dr. K. Maier and Prof. M. Dr. Rothgangel, Dr. M. Sander-Gaiser