

# NEWSLETTER

*Welcome ...*

*Spring, 2009*

to the EFTRE newsletter. Since the last newsletter we have had a very successful set of seminars in London where 5 members of EFTRE gave seminars to over 70 student teachers and others at the Institute of Education in London. At the same time the



EFTRE executive met to finalise the details for the conference in 2010. There is more on both the conference and the seminars later in this newsletter and resources from the seminars can be downloaded from the website. More information about all these things can be found at [www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net)

The European Year 2009 is the, 'Year of Creativity and Innovation' and Religious Education is full of both of these. Examples of practice in RE can be seen on the website and there is an article later in the newsletter on the idea for an RE olympics where you would have the chance to showcase the talent of your own students. From the UK there is an article on the Spirited Arts project to give an idea of what can be done in this area.

RE can naturally link in with creativity and especially the creative arts. Religion has had a vital and important place in musical, dramatic, dance and artistic history and continues to do. Two of our seminars in London (see below) showed how RE can use film and art to develop good practice. We would love to hear how RE is linking with these other areas of the curriculum in schools in your country.



RE has a vital role to play in developing a European population who have an understanding of the religious expressions and ways of thinking of their fellow citizens. Good RE can offer students a place in the classroom to discuss those issues that do not come up in other parts of the curriculum and a safe place to express their own views and thoughts. The work of EFTRE and of CoGREE are keeping these issues on the agenda and you can help by lobbying your MEP (if you have one) to ensure that the importance of Religious Education is understood.

The second series of EFTRE seminars took place in London in March and over 80 delegates listened to Peter Schreiner (Germany) talk about Religious Education across Europe and then took part in two of four workshops run by presenters from EFTRE organizations. See the article later in the newsletter and the website for documentation and support materials from the seminars.



We hope that you will enjoy both this newsletter and look at the links on the website [[www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net)] where you can always find more up-to-date news. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested.

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

**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 €10 (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)

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### REPORT ON COGREE ACTIVITIES

The Coordinating Group for Religion in Education in Europe is a framework of six European organizations that have a common concern about the value of religion in education in Europe. EFTRE is one of the member organizations from the very beginning of CoGREE in 1998.

The member organizations have agreed on statutes that include the following common aims:

- Exchange of information
- Clarification of common interests
- Agreement on common activities
- Representation of common interests.

In September 2008 CoGREE contributed to a conference in Berlin organized by two of its member organizations, ICCS and IV, in Berlin with the theme:

**DIVERSITY SHAPES EUROPE'S FUTURE. THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND RELIGION TO EDUCATION FOR LIVING TOGETHER IN EUROPE.** More than 100

experts from 25 European countries participated. Perspectives from politics, faith communities and developments in European institutions to the theme were introduced. In workshops models of good practice in intercultural and religious education were presented from e.g. Georgia, Spain, Northern Ireland, Germany, France, Austria and from the Netherlands.

A panel with representatives from European and international organizations, the Conference of European Churches and the Catholic Bishops Conference COMECE was addressed by EU Commissioner Ján Figel who underlined the tremendous

support of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 and the need of an active involvement of religious communities in shaping Europe's future. The European Year 2009 on Creativity and Innovation provides opportunities to continue an active involvement. Contributions from the conference are available through [www.cogree.com](http://www.cogree.com).

CoGREE has organized its 3<sup>rd</sup> Klingenthal Colloquy in October 2008 mainly discussing the White Paper on Intercultural Dialog "Living together as equals" of the Council of Europe, adopted in May 2008. A statement was drafted that is available through [www.cogree.com](http://www.cogree.com). A CD

ROM will consist of all the contributions from the colloquy and a number of additional documents related to the presentations. Please contact [Boekestein@comenius.de](mailto:Boekestein@comenius.de) to order copies for 5 euro each.



The statement of CoGREE RELIGION IN EDUCATION IN EUROPE is now available in English, German, French, Russian, Dutch and Serbian language. Additional material to the statement will be provided in due course.

The evaluation of the CoGREE secretariat that is sponsored by the Dutch organization Besturenraad, has been held in February 2009 in Voorburg. Further support is agreed for another year, but the request was expressed by the sponsor that CoGREE should develop actively toward a solid organization for making its work more relevant to the target groups of its member organizations.

Peter **Schreiner**, CoGREE moderator  
Sweir **Frouws** (CoGREE Chair)

### COUNCIL OF MINISTERS DECISION



In December 2008 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the highest decision making body of the Council, adopted a recommendation on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. The document describes the background and a wide range of activities that lay ground for this new recommendation directed to the member states. It summarizes earlier documents and underlines the "fundamental importance of taking into account the religious dimension of intercultural education in order to promote mutual understanding, tolerance and as culture of 'living together'". An appendix to the recommendation introduces some basic understanding of the Council about the key issues and principles that are important in the field of intercultural education that takes account of the religious dimension.

The whole text can be downloaded through the search website <https://wcd.coe.int>. It is registered under CM/Rec(2008)12.

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### A SAFE PLACE FOR DEBATE?

How safe is your classroom for discussion and debate? Are there subjects that are not allowed or opinions that cannot be discussed? We would be interested in hearing examples from the classroom of the "rules of discussion" in your school. Here are a few from my classroom:

1. Listen with care to what the other people are saying before you respond
2. Treat what they say with respect, they have the right to a different opinion to yours
3. Argument is not the same as disagreement an argument must have logic and rationale
4. It is OK to disagree and to say you disagree but not OK to be rude or personal
5. Other people might say things that offend you - you need to think about why they offend and not just get angry.



The RE classroom might be the only place in the school where students can openly, calmly and respectfully discuss difficult and life changing topics it is important you have some rules for such discussions and that you provide this safe space. One useful technique is that of talking stones. Each student has a small number of stones and when they want to contribute to the conversation they must put a stone into a pot in the middle of their table / circle. Once they have used up all their stones they are no longer able to say anything but must be a listener. They have to make important decisions about when they speak. For more on this topic see **Norman Richardson's** seminar in London (below and on the website) and the article on **True Tube**.

Paul **Hopkins** (UK)



## THE EFTRE SEMINARS: LONDON 2009

The second set of EFTRE seminars in London were very well attended with over 60 students from the Institute of Education, from the University of East London and from Bath Spa University attending a lecture by Peter **Schreiner** (Germany) and two workshops from those offered by Elisabeth **Faber** (Denmark), Marit **Svare** (Norway), Norman **Richardson** (UK, Northern Ireland) and Hugo **Verkest** (Belgium). More on these workshops can be seen in the short articles below and also on the EFTRE website at: [www.eftre.net/seminars\\_london.html](http://www.eftre.net/seminars_london.html)

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### AN INTRODUCTION TO RE ACROSS EUROPE

Peter **Schreiner** (Germany) is an educational researcher at the Comenius-Institut [A Protestant Centre for Research and Development in Education]. The seminar gave an overview about the current situation and developments of Religious Education in schools around different parts of Europe. Some key characteristics were used to illustrate and encourage a comparative perspective. In the second part of the presentation recent developments in some selected countries were introduced as well as some important European activities. His paper can be found on the [website](#)



### JAPANESE BUDDHISM: A WORKSHOP



Elisabeth **Faber** (Denmark) is an upper secondary school teacher. She teaches RE and History and is a student adviser. She has been a member of the board of the Danish organization for RE-teachers in the upper secondary school for the last 7 years. She has arranged a study tour for RE-teachers to Japan in the fall of 2008.

Japanese Buddhism is a fascinating, but for many students foreign, religious subject. The workshop discussed why it is important to teach unfamiliar religions and how to approach teaching an unfamiliar religion. Do we choose a different approach as when we teach e.g. about Christianity? Shall we look for the exotic, for similarities or for both?

How to introduce an unfamiliar religion was discussed and an example of how to construct a course in Japanese Buddhism was shown. Examples from Zen and Shin Buddhism were used in the workshop.

Elisabeth's presentation can be found on the [website](#).

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## USING FILM IN THE TEACHING OF RE

In this session Marit **Svare** (Norway) covered, in her opinion, the most important films to use when teaching RE. Then a range of film was shown to stimulate a discussion related to sources, topics and the theological questions raised. The session also considered the special consideration that needs to be taken when making a film of a holy text. The Key Question for this session was "What are the most important things to consider when choosing films to teach the Christian gospel?"



On the [website](#) you will find the seminar presentation and a list of key films. If you have a favourite film to use in the teaching of RE let us know at [newsletter@eftre.net](mailto:newsletter@eftre.net)

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## LEARNING BY HE ... ART

In this interactive workshop **Hugo Verkest** (Belgium) gave a selected overview of artifacts and symbols that can promote creative and critical thinking in relation to religious topics, spirituality and citizen education nowadays. The delegates then tried to find answers to the following methodological questions:

- \* What kind of vocabulary / grammar do we need to decode religious art or the religious dimension in art?
- \* Which didactic tools can we use in the classroom to work with masterpieces within an intercultural and inter-religious context?



Participants brought a reproduction of their favourite masterpiece linked with religion

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## TEACHING RE IN A RELIGIOUSLY DIVIDED CONTEXT



**Norman Richardson** (UK, Northern Ireland). Drawing on experiences of teaching R.E. in the religiously divided and increasingly ethnically diverse region of Northern Ireland this seminar offered suggestions for how to approach such work with children and young people. The session included experiences of some practical, active-learning strategies which should be relevant in a range of different contexts.

On the [website](#) are a series of documents: Religious Education where there is Religious Division; Teaching RE in a religiously divided context: A Northern Ireland perspective; Teaching RE Inclusively; Ground rules for religious discussion; Dealing with controversial issues in the classroom; and Reflections on religious diversity in RE.

## BERLIN REJECTS RELIGIOUS LESSONS



A referendum in Germany has failed to give children a choice between classes in secular ethics or religion. The outcome maintains the status quo of compulsory lessons in secular ethics and voluntary religious studies.

Supporters of the proposal argued that religious lessons would better instill values that could prevent German-born Muslims becoming radicalised. The low turnout, less than 30%, meant the referendum was invalidated, but most votes were against the proposal.

### Change 'divisive'

The referendum was organized by the city's religious communities, including Muslims. Among those who backed the proposal was Chancellor Angela Merkel, who publicly endorsed the referendum.

Opponents said that any changes to the curriculum would be divisive. Ethics classes have been compulsory in Berlin schools since 2006. But in most of the rest of Germany pupils have a choice between religion and ethics.

Germany's highest court rejected a challenge to the Berlin arrangement in 2007. Berlin introduced ethics classes after the "honour" killing of a Muslim woman by her husband, a shocking incident in a city that is often seen as a multicultural success story.

Before the change, children in the city could choose to take voluntary religious education classes, but these were poorly attended.



**This news first appeared on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news websites.**

### A STUDY OPPORTUNITY



One month Fellowships are available for teachers of Religious Education in schools at Oxford Brooke's University in the UK and a number of other European Universities. The object of the fellowships is to provide time for teachers to do research of value to the teaching of religious education in schools and to learn about the teaching of Religious Education in another country.

For details see the FREE website at [www.mmiweb.org.uk/free/](http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/free/)

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### THE FINNISH-BALTIC INITIATIVE IN DEVELOPING TEACHER TRAINING FOR RE



Since 2003 specialists of religious education in Finland, Estonia and Latvia cooperate closely in exchanging ideas and in developing Religious Education. One form of this cooperation is organizing academic conferences with the aim of acquiring a wider view of the results of current research in the field and creating opportunities for doctoral students to present their research on the international level.

We are pleased to announce the 4th international FBI conference - "Inter-cultural dialogue and Religious Education", which will take place on September 24th to 26th, 2009, in Tartu, Faculty of Theology, University of Tartu. During this conference lecturers, researchers and doctoral students in religious education will be able to present their latest research findings on religious education. This is one of the few opportunities for doctoral students of the Baltic region to present internationally their research in a supportive and positive atmosphere, as well as for Baltic and Finnish universities to promote further cooperation and joint research projects in the field of religious education.

The conference language is English, Keynote speakers of the conference are Prof. Mirja Talib from the University of Helsinki and Dr. Aune Valk from the University of Tartu. There is no charge for the conference but participants will need to fund their travel and accommodation.

For more details see the conference website at <http://www.ortoweb.fi/FBI/index.htm>

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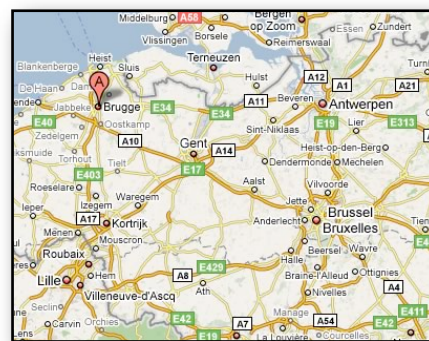


## CONFERENCE 2010: UPDATE

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

The conference website is now taking bookings for the 2010 conference. Some key information is below and more can be found on the website.

- Getting to Bruges
- Accommodation
- Workshops



The **conference fee** has been set at **€270** which includes all conference activities including trips and meals (including conference dinner but excluding Thursday evening which is a free evening to explore Bruges). The fee does NOT include accommodation or travel to the conference. There are some scholarships available [see the website for details]. There is also an “**early bird**” reduction of 10% for those booking before 1st April 2010 making the conference only **€243**. The final date for booking is 8th July 2010.

#### Getting to Bruges

**By train:** Bruges is about 50 mins from Brussels Midi railway station. High speed trains come to Brussels from London, Paris, Amsterdam, Köln, Berlin and connect to the wider European network.

**By air:** Flights come into Brussels from most European cities. Check the low cost airlines in early 2010 such as Easyjet, German Wings, Air Berlin, RyanAir, Norwegian

**By car:** Driving is about 120km from Brussels and there will be parking at the conference centre if arranged ahead of time. Take the E40 from Brussels and then the E403 from the highway.

Upon arriving at the railway station of Bruges a taxi or bus (nr. 4 or 14) will take you to Langerei, the street that runs parallel to Potterierei where the conference is situated. Leave the bus at Sabbestraat stop and take a short walk to the conference building at Potterierei 72.

#### Accommodation

Whilst accommodation is not part of the conference fee there are suggestions on the **website** of places to stay in Bruges for the duration of the conference and before and after.

#### Workshops

There are a number of workshops around the theme of the conference. More details are on the website and will develop over the next few months. If you would like to offer either a poster display or workshop then see the details on the website.

### The Keynote Speakers

**Professor Robert Jackson** (UK): Bob Jackson is a well known speaker on the European RE circuit and has led or been involved with a number of major initiatives within the European field. Robert (Bob) Jackson is Director of WRERU, and is a leading figure in international debates about religions and education in Europe and beyond. He is currently contributing to a Council of Europe project on religious diversity as a dimension of intercultural education, to the Oslo Coalition's project on education for freedom of religion or belief and to an EC Framework 6 project on religious education, dialogue and conflict, involving 10 European Universities (REDCo).



His book *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (2004) was selected by the American Academy of Religion for discussion at its conference in San Antonio, Texas. Bob Jackson was recently awarded a higher doctorate (DLitt) by the University of Wales for his contribution to international research in religions and education.

**Pauliina Arola** (FIN): is Director of International Co-operation at FinnChurchAid, one of Finland's largest development and humanitarian NGOs. At FinnChurchAid she heads work on development co-operation, humanitarian relief, peace and ecumenical relations. Prior joining FCA she was worked, among other things, as Executive Director at Crisis Management Initiative, a track two diplomatic endeavour specialised at developing the capacity of international community to respond to the challenges of crisis and at offering services of peace mediation. Former President of European Youth Forum and VicePresident of European Peacebuilding Liaison Office. Teacher by training and civic worker by heart Pauliina Arola is a mother of little girl and has devoted her free time to poverty reduction and enhancement of the agenda of empowerment in Finland as a Chairperson of the Finnish Federation of Settlements.



As well as Professor **Jackson** and Ms **Arola** EFTRE is pleased that Mr Dave **Francis** (UK) has agreed to be the conference rapporteur and Mr Peter **Schreiner** (Germany) will be setting us challenges for the future. We look forward to their input and challenges at the denouement of the conference.

## THE REDCO RESEARCH PROJECT



The EC-funded European research project **“Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European countries?”** (REDCo)

ran from March 2006 till March 2009. The REDCo project represents an approach to addressing the question how religions and values can contribute to either dialogue or tension in Europe. Researchers in the humanities and social sciences co-operate in a thematic and methodological approach in order to gain better insight into how European citizens of different religious, cultural and political backgrounds can live together and enter into dialogue of mutual respect and understanding. These differences are studied in their impact on modern Europe and the lives of its citizens. The REDCo-consortium empirically studied how differences within European societies can be addressed without creating conflict or leading to exclusion. Empirical studies, targeting students in the 14-16-year age group, looked into their own perceptions of dialogue or conflict within the different national contexts. These include a dual perspective of, on the one hand, the subjects' own perspectives and, on the other hand, analyses of observed teaching in both dialogue and conflict situations.

REDCo is a project funded by the European Commission for the period from March 2006 to February 2009. It is coordinated by Wolfram Weisse from the University of Hamburg. Eight European countries (Estonia, Russia, Norway, Germany, The Netherlands, France, England and Spain) participate.

Two of its most important results<sup>1</sup> are:

- A finding of the greatest relevance is the great openness of pupils throughout Europe towards religious and cultural differences: They not only accept religious pluralism, they welcome it. In order for this openness to continue and grow and prejudice to be overcome, the education system has a major role to play.
- The role of the school is significant throughout Europe: To provide room and scope for pupils to learn more about religions - not only “their own” religions and world views - and at the same time to identify and address prejudice.

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<sup>1</sup> See for detailed analyses of REDCo the following publications:

Jackson, R., Miedema, S., Weisse, W. & Willaime, J.-P. (Eds.) (2007) *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts and Debates*, Muenster, Waxmann

Knauth, Th., Jozsa, D.-P., Bertram-Troost, G. & Ipgrave, J. (Eds)(2008) *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society. A qualitative Study on Teenage Perspectives in Europe*, Muenster: Waxmann.

Avest, I. ter, Jozsa, D.-P., Knauth, Th., Rosón, J. & Skeie, G. (Eds)(2009) *Dialogue and Conflict on Religion. Studies of classroom interaction in European countries*, Muenster: Waxmann (in print).

Alvarez Veinguer, A., Dietz, G., Jozsa, D.P., & Knauth, Th. (Eds)(2009) *Islam in Education in European countries - Pedagogical Concepts and Empirical Findings*, Waxmann: Münster (in print).

Valk, P., Bertram-Troost, G., Friederici, M. & Béraud, C. (Eds)(2009) *Teenager's perspectives on the Role of Religion in their Lives, Schools and Societies. A European Quantitative Study*, Waxmann: Muenster.

Want, A. van der, Bakker, C., Avest, I. Ter, Everington, J. (Eds)(2009) *Teachers responding to Religious Diversity in Europe. Researching Biography and Pedagogy*, Waxmann: Muester.

## **SOME OF THE MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM REDCO?**

The following are the key research findings from the REDCo project for more details see the full report from the website

- ★ The majority of students appreciated the religious heterogeneity in their societies, although a range of prejudices was expressed.
- ★ The most important source of information about religions and world-views is generally the family, followed by the school.
- ★ Students from families with migration backgrounds are more likely to consider religion important for their lives.
- ★ Students are well aware of and experience religious diversity mostly in, but also outside school.
- ★ Students tend to socialise with peers from the same background as themselves, even when they live in areas characterised by religious diversity.
- ★ Students often express a tolerant attitude more at an abstract than a practical level. The tolerance expressed in classroom discussion is not always replicated in their daily life world.
- ★ Those who learn about religious diversity in school are more willing to enter into conversations about religions and worldviews with students from other backgrounds than those who do not have this opportunity for learning.
- ★ Students desire peaceful coexistence across religious differences, and believe that this is possible.
- ★ Students believe that the main preconditions for peaceful coexistence between people of different religions are knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews, shared interests, and joint activities.
- ★ In most countries students support the right of adherents to a moderate expression of religious faith in school. For example, they do not oppose in school the wearing of unobtrusive religious symbols or object to voluntary acts of worship for students who are adherents of a particular religion.
- ★ Students for whom religion is important in their lives are more likely to respect the religious background of others and value the role of religion in the world. Most students would like to see school more dedicated to learning about different religions than to encouraging a particular religious belief or worldview.
- ★ Students express their desire that learning about religions takes place in a safe classroom environment governed by agreed procedures for expression and discussion.
- ★ Students generally wish to avoid conflict on religious issues, and some of the religiously committed students feel especially vulnerable.
- ★ Dialogue is a favoured strategy for teachers to cope with diversity in the classroom, but students are more ambivalent about its value since in practice, not all students are comfortable with the way diversity is managed in schools.

A longer version of this report is available on the EFTRE website ([www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net)) and see also the REDCo website at <http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3481/index.html>

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN LATVIA



The Constitution of Latvia provides for freedom of religion. Latvia is a secular state and it does not profess allegiance to any religion. The Government distinguishes between 'traditional' Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believers, Baptists, and Jewish and 'new' religions.

All schools in Latvia have a choice to teach non-confessional subject, such as "Christian Faith," 'Ethics' in primary schools. There is also a choice of subjects, such as 'Ethics' or 'Christian Ethics' in grade 7 (age 11) as an elective subject. The subject "History of Religions" is taught at the secondary school level. Secondary schools usually employ teachers with a University degree in philosophy, history or social science to teach "History of Religions"

All traditional denominations have a legal right to teach religion in the primary schools. Due to the economic crises and the lack of finances, the administrators of the majority of schools choose not to employ teachers of religion. Also, contemporary parents choose 'Ethics' rather than 'Christian faith' for their children to be taught at the primary school age. Also schools choose not to teach Christian faith to avoid dividing children according to their religious adherence.

Teachers are qualified to teach religion by completing the program of Religious Education in several universities in Latvia or in the Catechetical Institutes. Teachers should belong to one of the traditional churches and should practice religion, as a precondition to get an approval from the Church to teach religion in the state run school. In several academic institutions the students have a choice of the subject 'Christian faith' and methods of teaching this in primary schools.

Religious educators in Latvia still adopt a confessional approach towards teaching religion, especially in religiously homogenous regions of the country. Teachers in these regions aim to nurture pupils into their religions. RE syllabus emphasises beliefs, history and practices of a certain faith community. There are some tendencies towards indoctrination and the lack of awareness of alternative religious beliefs.





The teachers argue, children at the primary school haven't developed their religious identity, therefore, anything that keeps children within one faith community is better than offering them a wide range of alternatives. The most common approach the teachers adopt in the primary school is 'learning from religion'. This is implemented by choosing a methodology appropriate for children's age. For example by relating biblical stories to children's every day life, singing songs, role playing biblical stories.

Still, there is a critical element missing in teaching religion. There is still a tendency to tell children what they ought to believe. Teachers are not willing to suggest the alternative view of science while teaching children different religious topics. Teachers display their inability to comprehend the legitimacy of another point of view and the inability of reflecting critically their own position. Ecumenism continues to be a new concept in the country, and traditional religious believers and the teachers of religion adopt a reserved attitude toward other religious groups.



RE still is not seen as a tool that can contribute to better relations between different ethnic and religious communities. Instead of employing religious educators, many schools choose to integrate intercultural and inter-religious content in the civic education subject, or to integrate it in the upbringing programs in state schools. Civic education in Latvia contributes to the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. The content of civic

education puts its emphasis on developing pupils' identity in a wider, richer context, characterized by different identities, backgrounds and perspectives. It aims at developing a better understanding of others, fostering inter-religious dialogue, particularly in school, as well as fighting all expression of xenophobia and intolerance. As it is written in the syllabus, the health of sustainable community depends on people being prepared to listen to each other or willing to work together for the common good.

Dzintra **Ilisko** - Latvian rep. on EFTRE board

### 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 VOX POPULI: TRUE TUBE

An exciting resource launched in February 2007 is being developed in the UK. This allows young people to give their opinions on a range of topics including a wide range that are of interest to the RE community. In its own words True Tube is a site which allows young people to:



*"Use the powerful medium of the web, and advances in streaming video technology to help you think, speak out and act on important issues happening in the real world outside your windows. It is an antidote to the passive, voyeuristic internet world where there is a tendency to look, laugh, play & judge without doing or saying anything of any consequence. TrueTube promotes moral and ethical discussion on the issues that matter for your generation, to inspire you to become involved in changing the world for the better."*

There are currently (April 2009) 8 themes all of which might be of interest and use to your students, these are: Body and Health, Community and Society, Crime and Punishment, Entertainment, Love and Sex, Race and Culture, **Religion and Ethics** and the Earth. In the Religion and Ethics section there are 36 discussions taking place.

These are not, perhaps, the normal topics in your RE classroom but they are questions which will challenge, invigorate and engage your pupils and are topics which are relevant to their lives. Topics such as:

- My religion is better than yours
- Religious clothes and discrimination
- Great British Ramadan
- War and peace in the Middle East the next generation



As well as the opportunity to view the opinions of others you can also upload and (using tools on the site) your own video contributions and suggest topics for discussion.

This is a site which is allowing young people to **Create, Communicate** and **Collaborate** key and important skills in both RE and for the 21st century. Check out the site, offer your young people the chance to contribute and think if such a venture could start in your country - or if there is such a group then please let us know, or write an article about it for the next newsletter. True Tube is looking for partners to develop similar systems across Europe so if you are able to help please contact us at [newsletter@eftre.net](mailto:newsletter@eftre.net)

Paul **Hopkins** (EFTRE, Executive Officer)

### AN RE OLYMPICS



In many subjects there are competitions between students from different schools such competitions can give impetus to learning and incentives to pupils and teachers. We are looking at the possibility of holding an "RE Olympics" for young people across Europe. There would be a number of themes and students would be invited to submit an electronic version of their work to a judging panel. We are just at the beginnings of this process and would love to hear any ideas you might have on the subject. We are thinking of making the competition based around the production of art, graphic, photographic or models so that there is less of a barrier with language. Themes could include "Who is god?", "Life is sacred", "Religion in my world", "It's not fair" but we are open to suggestions for themes as well as other ideas.

We are also looking for sponsors for these Olympics so if your organisation would like to be involved as a sponsor then we would be delighted to hear from you. As well as running the competition which will be quite low cost we would ideally like to host a student RE conference for the finalists.



### ART IN HEAVEN

Such a competition has been running in the UK since 2004. Young people have been invited to reflect on a number of themes and then to express these in a creative way through painting, drawing, graphic design or modeling. Religious Education has natural partnerships with subjects such as art, design and photography. The original themes were, "*the turning point of the story*", "*Peace!*", "*A spiritual moment*" and "*Design an RE logo*" and subsequent ones have included, "*A day to remember*", "*Where is God?*" and "*A just world*".



Each school is allowed to enter the best 8 pieces for the competition and over 8,000 entries have been sent in **but** most schools will have had far more pupils take part and it is estimated that **50,000** children have taken part in the competition.

This unleashing of creativity has been an amazing success in promoting

Religious Education in UK schools you can see the best of the best at the Spirited Arts gallery a [www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts/](http://www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts/)



The images shown here are from Holly (8), 'Dove in the flame' (2007) and Amy (15) 'Is your hand full of rice or money' (2006).

## EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE FROM SPAIN

### The pilgrim's way to Santiago with pupils of RE



**Aims of the activity:** RE encourages a balance between the spiritual, psychological and cultural development of pupils, in their own historical context and environment; it helps them to understand the cultural and artistic heritage of Spain.

At a time when Europe needed to be united, the Route to Santiago was the first element that made it possible. This pilgrimage became an unquestionable symbol, compatible with the diverse conceptions of the Christian people. The part of the route through France is the most travelled by and well promoted. It enters Spain through Roncesvalles and Somport, in the Pyrenees and crosses the autonomous communities of Aragón, Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla-León and Galicia.



We have made two stages of the Camino de Santiago to Puente la Reina. We have visited the Church of the Crucifijo (12th, 14th centuries), which was built by the members of the Order of the Temple and toured the Church of Santiago (12th century), located on the Mayor Street, which contains one of the finest multicolored sculptures representing the Apostle Santiago that can be found along the Santiago Route.

The credential of the journey is made with the Pilgrim's document. In each church, hostel, refuge where Pilgrims visit a stamp or signature is added to the card.

This journey encourages the RE class to make new friends, take part in some physical healthy activity and partake in a spiritual journey. The journey also encourages interdisciplinary learning: Christianity, History, Traditions, Art, Geography, Botany. On the journey the students are valuing the beauty of the countryside, encouraging important values such as: effort, friendship, respect, comradeship, solidarity, love for nature, sharing. At the end they will have developed respect for traditions traditions and developed a sense of solidarity with their classmates.

José Maria **Guardia** (EFTRE rep. Spain)



## A FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



**England** - A new curriculum in both primary (ages 5 to 11) and secondary (ages 11-16) is challenging for Religious Education. There is more emphasis on core skills and on cross-curricular subject integration. For more see <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

Lesley **Prior** - England representative

**Wales** - Eclips, a series of short videos from the BBC archives including 80 clips for RE (April 2009) all the clips are under 3 minutes and are on a vast range of topics. This is a valuable resource for schools across the age range. [www.bbc.co.uk/eclips](http://www.bbc.co.uk/eclips)

Denize **Morris** - Wales representative

**Northern Ireland** - In 2007 Northern Ireland commenced the implementation of a Revised Curriculum. Religious Education is not formally part of this curriculum, but rather sits alongside it as a compulsory subject though with provision for opting-out on grounds of conscience, as in many other countries. The fact that the RE Core Syllabus is written by representatives of four Christian denominations without any involvement from other faith communities remains a very controversial issue. The 2007 Revised Core Syllabus does include world religions for the first time in an official Northern Ireland syllabus, though only for the 11 to 14 age group. Plans are also now well in hand to restore world religions to the GCSE Religious Studies exam, from which the topic was withdrawn in the 1990s. Support materials are now available on the internet, including a section on world religions. This can be viewed at: [http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key\\_stage\\_3/areas\\_of\\_learning/religious\\_education/world\\_religions/index.asp](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/religious_education/world_religions/index.asp).

Other guidance material for post-primary schools is also available, but the RE curriculum for primary schools has, as yet, no formal guidance or support. Some evidence suggests that in many controlled primary schools (which are open to everyone but mainly serve the 'protestant' community) RE is very limited in quality and neglected in practice. Research on primary RE in this region of the UK is greatly needed in order to see how the situation of the subject can be improved.

Anyone wishing to learn more about RE and the various debates and issues in Northern Ireland will be able to find a range of articles by RE teacher educators and student teachers on the RRRE (Research Resources for Religious Education) website, managed by Religious Studies staff at Stranmillis University College: <http://www.stran.ac.uk/informationabout/research/researchresourcesforre/>.

Norman **Richardson** - Northern Ireland representative

### MA in Religious Education by Distance Learning

The course aims to develop the skills and understanding of those who already work or intend to work in fields connected with religious education in schools or in other branches of the education profession. The approach is pluralistic and multi-religious and our students may be of any faith or none.



Our MA is unique, drawing on the vast expertise of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit and delivered through distance learning methods. For more information contact Bob Jackson, the Course Leader [r.jackson@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:r.jackson@warwick.ac.uk) or Dr. Julia Ipgrave [julia.ipgrave@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:julia.ipgrave@warwick.ac.uk) <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/courses/postgraduate/higherdegrees/re/>



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### Overview of activities and meetings - Europe and Education 2009-10

<b>2009</b>	
4th-7th June	European Elections
24th-26th September	<b>4th International FBI conference.</b> Tartu, Estonia. For more details see <a href="http://www.ortoweb.fi/FBI/index.htm">http://www.ortoweb.fi/FBI/index.htm</a>
5th-9th October	<b>OFTO conference</b> - the spiritual heritage of the Cappadocians for the multi-confessional and multi-ethical Christianity today.
30th-31st October	<b>New Age and New religious movements</b> - Alternative spiritualities, the new age and new religious movements in Ireland - <a href="http://www.nrmireland.blogspot.com/">http://www.nrmireland.blogspot.com/</a>
13th-15th November	<b>EFTRE seminars</b> (Helsinki) and Executive meeting. Contact your country representative for more information
<b>2010</b>	
to be arranged	ICCS conference
23rd - 26th August, 2010 (to be confirmed)	<b>EFTRE conference:</b> "Contribution of RE/RS to reducing poverty and enhancing inclusion - Insiders and Outsiders" Bruges, Belgium <a href="http://www.eftre.net">www.eftre.net</a>



### CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?

We are happy to add items to the calendar both on the newsletter and on our website. Please contact us at [newsletter@eftre.net](mailto:newsletter@eftre.net) with details of your event.

