



2nd National Consultation on Signposts at the university of Hildesheim/ Germany

Report by Dr. Claudia Lenz / Dr. Peter Schreiner

On November 12 and 13, the Centre for Inclusion in Education (ZBI) at the University of Hildesheim staged two events related to the topics of teaching about religions and non religious convictions and of religious diversity as an element of intercultural education in general. Both events were co-organized by the European Wergeland Centre (EWC) and the Coordinating Group for Religion in Education (CoGREE) in collaboration with the Comenius-Institute in Muenster/Germany.

The annual "Diversity Day" arranged by the ZBI took place on November 12, under the title "Religious Diversity at schools". Teaching in several courses at the ZBI has been dedicated to the topic. Many well prepared students, as well as participants from outside the university attended a panel debate in the evening, which was moderated by ZBI director Professor Dr Viola Georgi and the director of the Comenius-Institute and CoGREE coordinator Dr Peter Schreiner. Six experts on religious education and intercultural education discussed different models applied in Germany: from confessional separated to integrated types. Christian and Muslim perspectives were represented as well as perspectives from intercultural education and media pedagogy. Questions of developing religious identity and encounter with religious diversity in a class room and school culture perspective were discussed in a very engaged manner. <http://zbi-uni-hildesheim.de/2586-2/>

On November 13, twenty invited experts from the field of religious and intercultural education participated in the 2nd National Expert Consultation on the dissemination of Signposts. The group consisted of varied fields: intercultural education and religious education as well as of study of religion and schoolbook analysis. After an introduction about the background of the Signposts document in Council of Europe policy developments and previous projects by Dr Claudia Lenz, EWC and an introduction to the discourse in Germany about intercultural education and the religious dimension by Dr Peter Schreiner, the participants discussed the relevance and applicability of Signposts and the Recommendation on "the dimension of religious and non-religious convictions in intercultural education" in Germany.

It was clearly expressed by the participants that the overall ethos of the Recommendation and of the Signposts document, pointing at the need to enable learners to learn about and encounter religious diversity in respectful and constructive ways, is of high significance. In particular, the notion of "Religiously sensitive schools" as pointing beyond subject teaching was welcomed.

However, a closer review of the approaches and empirical examples presented in Signposts would be necessary in order to "translate" it into the variety of existing educational contexts in Germany and to adapt some of the recommendations.

A working group intending to go on with this project was formed at the end of the consultation. <http://zbi-uni-hildesheim.de/expertenkonsultation-dimension-of-religions-and-non-religious-convictions-within-intercultural-education/>

Some observations from the events:

- The debate about Signposts engaged representatives from intercultural education, religious education and religious science. To create more conceptual dialogue and practical cooperation between these fields was regarded as a potential connected to Signposts.
- The need of a German translation of Signposts and its active promotion were seen as necessary but not sufficient preconditions for an active use and impact of the document in a German context.
- The reason for this was a somewhat ambivalent perception of the Signposts document:
 - The value of the broad scope of Signposts (intercultural education and the religious dimension including non religious world views) was underlined
 - The overall approach of Signposts was seen by some experts as too dominated by an English perspective to religious education that differs from the mainline of the German approach to religious education (confessional oriented) in a substantial way,
 - That said, there was a great interest in impulses from Signposts related to classrooms and schools as “safe(er) spaces” and whole school approaches (religiously sensitive school)
 - The empirical exemplifications provided were regarded by some experts to be too geographically limited and not convincingly sending the message that Signposts can inspire educational practice in a broad variety of contexts
 - It was stated that more initiatives are needed to explore which impulses Signposts could provide in a German context, with regard to religious education as well as inclusive education in general

Initiatives and proposals for future action:

- A steering group of six members was formed for follow up activities. The group consists of experts in the field of intercultural education and religious education (protestant, catholic, muslim) as well as of study of religion.
- Agreement that the cooperation between EWC, ZBI and CoGREE should be continued.