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## **Religious education: transnational developments**

There is a transnational flavour to this issue (32:3, 2010) of the *British Journal of Religious Education* (BJRE). One article reports research carried out by a Swede in Kenya, another discusses collaborative work with an American partner conducted by a Finnish scholar seconded to Stanford University, a third, by a German scholar working in Norway, argues for a transnational integrative approach to religious education. There is a core of articles from the UK, plus wider European contributions from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Norway, and a jointly written article from the USA. In addition to theoretical and methodological discussions, research approaches range from close qualitative classroom studies through ethnographic interviews with teachers and students to quantitative studies of young people on science and religion and on religion and values.

Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis report and discuss quantitative research on science and religion conducted with a sample of female sixth-form students. The discussion argues for fostering both a stronger understanding of scientific method and a deeper theological understanding of the doctrine of creation. Kirsi Tirri from Finland and Brandy Quinn from the USA focus on two college students, selected from a wider research population for case study through semi-structured interviews. Their analysis is conducted against a background of theoretical debates and empirical research on religion and spirituality. In relation to the different kinds of theologies that church school inspectors might hold, including exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist, as well as unreflective 'ordinary theologies', Peter Shepherd engages in a discussion of whether inspectors' beliefs might compromise their inspection judgements and calls for empirical research studies on this topic. Rob Freathy and Stephen Parker argue spiritedly for a revival of detailed historical studies in education in general and in religious education in particular. They aim to promote rigorous historical studies using a wide range of primary sources, including life history interviews. They argue especially for close historical scrutiny of the claims made about the history of religious education in England and Wales by postliberal theorists.

Two reports of qualitative research follow. Jonas Svensson, a Swedish scholar working in East Africa, discusses his ethnographic research on Islamic religious education teachers in a particular Kenyan town. In a close sociological classroom interaction study of religion in a Danish primary school, Mette Buchardt analyses the use of ethnic and religious categories as identity markers and processes of social classification.

Wanda Alberts argues for a form of integrative religious education in plural classrooms rather than separate confessional approaches. Coming from a background in the study of religions, Alberts provides a bridge between scholarship in religious studies and the world of religious education. Next, Nigel

Fancourt draws on his PhD study on self-assessment in religious education to describe practitioner research with adolescent pupils, showing how they were able to reflect on their developing knowledge, understanding, skills of evaluation and reflection, as well as their attitudes and values. Finally, Mandy Robbins and Leslie Francis give an overview of the Teenage Religion and Values Survey which was conducted during the 1990s with over 30,000 13- to 15-year-olds. The authors reflect on the project's methodology and consider insights into topics such as spiritual health, religious affiliation and 'belonging without believing' provided by the project's cumulatively collected data.

### **The European Wergeland Centre**

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) is itself a site of transnationality. The EWC is a European Resource Centre on education for human rights, democratic citizenship and intercultural understanding. Based on a cooperation agreement between Norway and the Council of Europe, the Centre was officially opened in May 2009. Religion is one of the cross-cutting themes pursued in the EWC's work, and several religious education related initiatives are currently in progress, including various events disseminating the research findings of the European Commission's Religion, Education, Dialogue, Conflict (REDCo) project, to be held in Norway, Austria and Germany. The EWC's main aim is to build bridges between policy, research and practice. The Centre provides services and activities within the fields mentioned above, and the main target groups are researchers, teacher trainers, teachers and other education professionals.

Since the publication of the last issue of the BJRE, The EWC – <http://www.theewc.org/> – has launched 'Share & Connect', a database for experts in the field of education for human rights, intercultural understanding and democratic citizenship, including the dimension of religion to all of these. Share & Connect gives users the opportunity to create their own profile and search for others, and aims at connecting education professionals in the field, such as researchers, PhD students and teacher trainers. If you are concerned professionally with or have an academic interest in religions and education, then do register. Share & Connect provides several opportunities, including providing the facility to look for experts in particular specialisms throughout Europe and beyond, to explore potential co-operation and partnerships, to connect with peers from theory and practice (for example forming networks on particular research themes, networks of PhD students or partnerships between academic specialists and teachers to produce high-quality materials). In order to register and create your own profile, visit [www.theewc.org](http://www.theewc.org/) for more information.

### **Religious diversity and education in Europe Book Series**

Continuing the transnational theme, the book series Religious diversity and education in Europe, published by Waxmann, started in 2006 and is now a major source of European research findings on religious education, with no less than 19 volumes published since 2006.

The series publishes significant new research in religious education in Europe, including revised versions of recent PhD theses. A recent one is Dr Jenny Berglund's book Teaching Islam: Islamic religious education in Sweden, which extends the range of research on Islam and education in Europe.

Most of the REDCo Project's research is published through volumes in the Religious diversity and education in Europe series, the latest (Volume 19) being *From indifference to dialogue? Estonian young people, the school and religious diversity* written by Dr Olga Schihalejev, a member of the BJRE's International Advisory Board. A special issue of the BJRE on the REDCo Project, to be published in March 2011, will mark another stage in the dissemination of the project's research. The special issue will subsequently be published by Routledge as a book, in Autumn 2011. The details will be Jackson, R. (Ed) *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research*, London: Routledge.

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