

## ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN HAMBURG AND NORDRHEINWESTPHALIA THROUGH STRUCTURAL MODELLING

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### Background

This paper uses the German data from a questionnaire survey (Valk et al. 2009) carried out as part of the REDCo (Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict) project. The questionnaire, which was based on a previous qualitative survey (Josza 2008, Knauth 2008), included questions on 14-16 year old students' experiences of and attitudes to religious education, and to their own and other religions, as well as background data.

### Research Questions

The questionnaire aimed to assess three pair of questions; whether religiously committed students were less tolerant, and less open to dialogue on religious issues, than non-religious students; whether students who have experienced religious diversity in education are more tolerant, and more open to dialogue; and whether students who have personally encountered religious diversity are more tolerant and more open to dialogue.

### Methods

Univariate and bivariate analyses of the German data have been published by Josza (2009). Children generally favour a multifaith approach to RE; children who have experienced a multifaith or pluralistic approach to religious education where young people learn about different religions, (and occasionally also about non-religious belief systems) tend to be more tolerant and than those who have experienced RE oriented to a specific faith; girls are more religiously committed and more interested in studying religious diversity than boys; Muslims are more committed than adherents of other religions or worldviews.

### Frame

This paper uses structural modelling to give an overall comparison of attitudes to these issues held by students in Hamburg and North-Rhine Westphalia, where different models of religious education (RE) used: German Länder have different systems of RE which permits comparison of otherwise similar student populations who have differing RE experiences. Language background and gender were also included in the structural model as independent variables, with the importance of religion to respondents as an intermediate variable influencing their other attitudes. The large numbers of questions were grouped by factor analysis using Kaiser's varimax rotation before the structural model was built. Preliminary analysis indicated that a six-factor model gave the best fit. The factor groups extracted were, in order of variance accounted for, integrative attitudes to RE, commitment to religion, secular hostility to religion, dialogue across religions, contact across religions and separateness in RE. The other items referred to in italics below are individual variables.

### Research findings

The results indicated that students who rated the importance of religion to them as high answered the questions about commitment positively; commitment in turn related positively to attitudes to integrative RE, contact and dialogue across religions, which were grouped as a latent attitude of inter-religious understanding. Those who are religious themselves have more positive attitudes to religious education and to other religions. However, commitment was also related to an attitude of

separateness from other religions. Students who gave a low importance to religion showed secular hostility which was negatively related to understanding. The structure of attitudes resembles those found in previous analyses of REDCO project data from England and Estonia.

Girls considered the importance of religion somewhat higher, and therefore also commitment and understanding. Respondents whose language spoken at home indicates they have a migration background rated the importance of religion markedly higher, but also gave a somewhat higher rating to separateness. However they also showed more commitment and understanding.

The effects of RE model were limited as RE model is a group-level effect whereas language at home and importance of religion act at an individual level; this is consistent with other work (Neill & Schihalejev 2010). The multifaith model used in Hamburg appeared to lead to more positive attitudes to integrative RE and to lower separateness and secular hostility than the confessional RE used in North-Rhine Westphalia. These outcomes may be threatened by current moves to introduce confessional RE in Hamburg, and the data implies that faith schools in the UK might have similar effects. Similar analyses of the REDCO data from England and Estonia (Neill & Schihalejev 2010) showed much less divergence in attitudes to RE, and hostility to other religions, in England, where the multifaith approach to RE is general, than in Estonia, where students have no or differing experiences of RE.