



SIG 19 Religions and Worldviews in Edu- cation Newsletter

Issue 1/2025

Dear SIG 19 Members and Friends,

EARLI and JURE conference "*Realising Potentials through Education: Shaping the Minds and Brains for the Future*" in August is approaching. Our SIG participates with an Invited Symposium titled "Religious Identities and Sense of Belonging: Their Relevance for Future Citizenship Education". In this Newsletter, you can find more information about the symposium itself, its speakers with two chosen portraits, and abstracts. We are looking forward to discussing interesting topics together with you in Graz. In addition, you are welcome to join us after the SIG 19 business meeting for dinner on Tuesday 26 August 2025.

Furthermore, we have an interview with Associate Professor Viktor Aldrin from the University of Borås, Sweden. He will answer questions about his research as well as the CORE-Network that is combining religious education and climate change issues.

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NUMBER OF SIG19 MEMBERS

30

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

**YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS IM-
PORTANT!**

We wish you a nice summer break!

Petra and Sanna

The 29th JURE 2025 Pre-Conference

Date: 23-24 August 2025

Host: EARLI and the University of Graz, Austria

Venue: Graz, Austria



The 21th Biennial EARLI Conference

Date: 25-29 August 2025

Host: EARLI and the University of Graz, Austria

Venue: Graz, Austria

The theme of the conference is “**Realising Potentials through Education: Shaping the Minds and Brains for the Future**”.

For further information regarding the conference please see:

<https://www.earli.org/events/earli2025>

EARLI preliminary programme: <https://www.earli.org/assets/files/Preliminary-Programme-OCT24.pdf>

JURE preliminary programme: <https://earli.org/assets/files/Preliminary-Programme-JURE2025-JAN.pdf>

You can find out more about the keynote speakers and their talks here:

<https://www.earli.org/events/earli2025#section-keynotes>

SAVE THE DATES:

Please join us after the SIG 19 business meeting for **a dinner on Tuesday 26 August** 2025. There we can get to know each other better.

Symposium title: Religious Identities and Sense of Belonging: Their Relevance for Future Citizenship Education

Organizers: Alexander Unser, TU Dortmund University for SIG 19

Chair: Alexander Unser, TU Dortmund University

Discussant: Martin Ubani, University of Eastern Finland

This symposium explores the multifaceted intersections of religion, citizenship, and education, with a particular focus on the concept of belonging and its implications for democratic participation, inclusion, and identity formation. Drawing on insights from the international ReaC (Religion and Citizenship) research network and studies conducted in various European contexts, the symposium brings together four contributions that examine how educational systems can respond to contemporary challenges such as polarization, exclusion, and declining civic engagement.

The first presentation provides a conceptual framework for the symposium, introducing the notions of *sense of belonging* and *politics of belonging* as key to understanding the role of religious and civic education in pluralistic societies. The following contributions build on this foundation through empirical studies and curriculum analysis: one examines the role of minority teachers in Finland as cultural brokers and agents of inclusive citizenship; another analyzes the pedagogical handling of spontaneous controversial statements in classrooms as missed opportunities for democratic engagement; and the final presentation investigates the extent to which German religious education curricula explicitly address human rights, democracy, and political education.

Together, the presentations offer a scientifically grounded and educationally relevant discussion on how religious and civic education can foster social cohesion, critical dialogue, and democratic trust in increasingly diverse and contested educational landscapes.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Cultural Diversity in School, Religiosity and Spirituality, Social Aspects of Learning and Teaching

Presentations:

- Intersecting Paths: Religion, Citizenship, and the Construction of Belonging in Education
(Alexander Unser, TU Dortmund University)
- Negotiating citizenship and belonging in Finnish schools: minority teachers as cultural brokers
(Inkeri Rissanen, Niina Putkonen and Maija Yli-Jokipii, Tampere University & University of Helsinki)
- Spontaneous controversial statements in the classroom – lost educational moments
(Lene Cherize Haugland Sirevåg, University of Agder)
- Human rights, democracy and politics in the school subject of Religious Education
(Manfred Pirner, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg)

Abstracts:

Intersecting Paths: Religion, Citizenship, and the Construction of Belonging in Education (Alexander Unser, TU Dortmund University)

This presentation opens the symposium by providing a theoretical framework that underpins the subsequent three presentations. It draws on the findings of the international ReaC (Religion and Citizenship) research network, which has explored the intersections of religious and citizenship education in over twenty European countries over the past three years. The presentation aims to contextualize the shared challenges, tensions, and possibilities that arise when religious and civic dimensions of education converge in diverse sociopolitical settings.

Two central theoretical concepts structure this analysis: sense of belonging and politics of belonging. These concepts offer a lens through which to examine how educational systems mediate inclusion, exclusion, identity formation, and social cohesion. By elaborating on these frameworks, the presentation highlights how belonging is not only a personal experience but also a contested political and pedagogical project.

Scientifically, this presentation contributes to the development of a comparative theoretical vocabulary for understanding the role of religion in civic education. Educationally, it offers a foundation for rethinking curricular and pedagogical strategies that address diversity, pluralism, and democratic participation. This framing sets the stage for the more focused contributions that follow in the symposium.

Negotiating citizenship and belonging in Finnish schools: minority teachers as cultural brokers (Inkeri Rissanen, Niina Putkonen, Maija Yli-Jokipii; Tampere University & University of Helsinki)

Diversifying the teaching staff in culturally diverse schools is considered an important means to develop both parents' and students' trust and feelings of belonging in the school. Minority teachers typically are assigned the role of a cultural broker and expected to help immigrant families navigate the school system; yet they also encounter resistance when exposing the privileges of the dominant group or call for extra resources to fight against existing inequalities. In this paper, we explore the role Finnish minority teachers as cultural brokers and as agents of inclusive citizenship in the school community. We triangulate findings based on qualitative content analysis of several datasets: semi-structured interviews with Muslim cultural brokers (n=8), Islamic religious education teachers (n=17) and Plurilingual Learners' Mother Tongue (PLMT) teachers (n=20), as well as qualitative questionnaire responses of PLMT teachers (n=47). According to our findings, most Finnish minority teachers implement democratically oriented education, promote critical thinking and brave encountering of contradictory topics, mediate intra- and intergroup tensions and take up a wide variety of cultural brokering tasks. In some schools they face resistance and even straightforward discrimination yet have a strong ethos of societal agency that they strive to implement both as part of their work and more broadly within Finnish society. We discuss the implications of our findings for both micro- and macro-level developments in the education system, focusing on recognizing and unlocking the potential in the work of minority teachers.

Spontaneous controversial statements in the classroom – lost educational moments

(Lene Cherize Haugland Sirevåg, University of Agder)

This paper investigates spontaneous controversial statements in the classroom as opportunities for practicing productive disagreement. Through analysing classroom situations from years 7 and 8 in two schools, the study explores teachers' responses to these statements and the educational opportunities they hold.

Europe witness a decline in political participation among young voters, growing political alienation, and a deterioration of democratic values. Citizenship education aims to counter these trends for example through valuing and practicing disagreement. Addressing controversial issues can be one alternative to such engagement, and this study examines classroom situations involving such high-intensity topics, to study how they are handled and whether they are treated as educational opportunities.

The theoretical framework is based on Chantal Mouffe's agonistic model, which emphasizes agonistic pluralism and the role of passion in democracy. Using an abductive approach the analysis reveals that spontaneous controversial statements linked especially to religion and sexuality often become lost, and educational opportunities for practicing productive disagreement. Three forms of suppression seem to contribute to this loss: *moral suppression*, *behavioural suppression* and *suppression of passionate agency*.

To reduce these lost moments, we need to explore these suppression mechanisms, and reconsider how we conceptualize political engagement in education considering what forms of agency count in education. The risk if we keep losing these educational moments is that we create a distance between education and young people that can trigger sensations of not belonging and further escalate political and educational fatigue among our future generations.

Human rights, democracy and politics in the school subject of Religious Education

(Manfred Pirner, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg)

In academic discourse as well as in official government papers, RE in Germany has repeatedly been presented as a subject that promotes human rights values and democratic attitudes and thus contributes to citizenship education. In particular, it has been emphasized that citizenship education at schools should not be secularistic in excluding religious identities but rather be inclusive and pluralistic by building bridges between religious values and democratic values in the sense of John Rawls' idea of an overlapping consensus. However, recently, suspicion has grown that such contributions of RE remain widely implicit and indirect, while explicit references to human rights, democracy and politics are scarce. As a first step to check this assumption empirically, a comprehensive quantitative content analysis of the RE school curricula in all the 16 German federal states (Bundesländer) was carried out. It widely confirms the tendency that references to human rights, democracy and political issues remain primarily implicit. It also shows significant differences between the Bundesländer and between different types of schools. As a conclusion, it seems that on the whole the potential of RE to contribute to citizenship education is not yet realized to a desirable extent and that RE curricula should be revised

in this direction. There are positive examples in some federal states and school types that can stimulate such revision and further development of RE curricula in other federal states and types of school.

Manfred Pirner, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany

Manfred L. Pirner is Full Professor of Religious Education at Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany, Director of the Research Unit for Public Religion and Education (www.rupre.uni-erlangen.org) and Co-Director of the Competence Centre for School Development and Evaluation (www.kse.phil.fau.de) as well as founding member of the Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (<https://www.humanrights-centre.fau.de/>). His main research fields are public theology and public education; human rights, education and religion; refugees and religion; religiosity and professionalism of teachers; digital media and religious education.

At the symposium, his focus will be on the question of the extent to which political education is part of religious education. In recent RE discourse, the political dimension of RE has been rediscovered and re-emphasized. However, findings from a quantitative content analysis of German RE curricula show that notions such as human rights, children's rights, human dignity, democracy, etc. are still scarce in the curricula of some German states.



Lene Cherize Haugland Sirevåg, University of Agder, Norway



Lene Cherize H. Sirevåg holds a PhD in Education from the University of Agder, where she focused on Children's agency and lived citizenship in school. In her research, she has specialised in the field of citizenship education and children's play and has been working as an Associate Professor of Education at the Department of Pedagogy at the University of Agder since 2023. Her scholarly activity centres around empirical ethnographic research, philosophy of education & conceptual work, in addition to controversial issues, attentiveness to children's agency and lives in institutions – including their right to play and participation. She is involved in several projects in Norway and abroad.

At the symposium, Lene will present findings from a recent ethnographic study focusing on spontaneous controversial statements in a Lower Secondary school in Norway. The study examines to what extent these statements are treated as educational opportunities for discussion and productive disagreement, eminent in citizenship education. In her findings, Lene highlights that these statements are most often suppressed and become lost educational moments for engaging in productive disagreement.

(Portraits and Pictures were sent by the participants.)



Position: Associate Professor, Dr.
Institution: University of Borås
Country: Sweden

1. What are your areas of specialisation in religious education research?

Thanks for the invitation to the interview! In my research, I explore the intersection of Practical Theology and Religious Education, with a particular interest in how climate change is addressed in teaching, how minority perspectives are included in religious discourse. I've always valued international and interdisciplinary collaboration, especially across Theology and Pedagogy – recently also Natural Sciences. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to spend time as a Visiting Junior Professor at the University of Münster (2024) and as a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Frankfurt (2018). My doctoral work also took me abroad, with research stays in Helsinki and Cambridge.

Since 2016, I've been a Senior Lecturer in Religious Education at the University of Borås (Sweden), and in 2018 I was promoted to Associate Professor/Theol.habil in Practical Theology with Religious Education. I lead the research group SONOMA – focused on interdisciplinary education. Last year, I launched the Collaborative Network for Climate Change in Religious Education (CORE)

2. In the last Newsletter we advertised the CORE-Network you are the leader of. Let's talk about it a bit more:

** How was the idea for the CORE-Network born?*

Ecumenical cooperation has long inspired me. Living in a strongly secular society has shown me how people of different faiths often share more in common than what divides them. Why work separately when we can achieve more together – even with deep existential

differences? Today's young people need to see adults collaborating across worldviews to make the world better.

In 2023, I launched a project on climate change in Religious Education, recognising that the field was fragmented and under-researched. At the 2024 SIG meeting, I raised the question of how we, as scholars, might do more – and was encouraged to start a network.

** How did you decide to combine religious education and climate change issues?*

Climate change is one of the most profound and urgent transformations of our time. Despite this, the Swedish school curriculum does not address climate change as an existential dilemma, and climate anxiety is notably absent. This leaves young people with unresolved questions and growing frustration – areas where Religious Education can and should offer guidance. I believe we must reach beyond traditional academic boundaries to show what religions can contribute to this crisis: hope, moral courage, and the strength to act in difficult times.

On a personal level, I want to be able to tell my children that I did everything I could in the climate crisis.

** Could you shortly remind us of the main goals and purposes of CORE?*

Yes, of course. The Collaborative Network for Climate Change in Religious Education (CORE) unites scholars from diverse faiths to address climate change through religious education. CORE promotes interfaith dialogue, research collaboration, and innovative pedagogies. Key aims include exploring spiritual and ethical resources within religions, fostering interdisciplinary work on regenerative education, challenging harmful historical narratives, and sharing practical resources for global educators. The network also builds an international community of care, supporting collaboration in the face of environmental and political challenges.

** Although the network is still quite young, what has it achieved so far?*

CORE held its first online meeting in February 2025 to establish its aims and structure. The network agreed to meet four times per year, including an annual summit and thematic symposia. Since then, it has grown to 45 members from Europe, the Americas, and Africa, representing Religious Education and Practical Theology. With a rich diversity of faiths and worldviews – including Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists, and secular scholars. It's been a fantastic start so far!

(Answers and a picture were sent by Viktor Aldrin.)

A REMINDER TO SUBSCRIBE EARLI MEMBERSHIP

Dear friends of SIG 19,

As you know, we are one of the smaller SIGs within EARLI and need every year a minimum of 30 members to continue our work. The Religions and Worldviews in Education SIG brings together researchers from various backgrounds, such as theology, religious studies, psychology, pedagogy, educational studies and philosophy. The SIG 19 is advocating empirical and theoretical research that includes cognitive, social and emotional components.

If you have not subscribed yet, please consider [renewing your membership](#) in our SIG for 2025.

Please note, when you purchase an EARLI membership, you can join up to two SIGs free of charge!

Become a member now!

- Dr. Tamer Amin, American University of Beirut, Egypt
- Dr. Asligül Aysel, University of Innsbruck, Austria
- Dr. Alexandre Bachkirov, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman
- Dr. Inger Marie Dalehefte, University of Agder, Norway
- Prof. Dr. Eveline Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Schwyz University of teacher education, Switzerland
- Dr. Aline Muff, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
- Dr. Katharina Neumann, University of Zurich, Institute of Education, Germany
- Dr. Saila Poulter, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Dr. Anne Suryani, Monash University, Australia
- Dr. Johanna Fee Ziemes, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

We are very happy to be able to welcome new members to SIG 19!

We hope our new members will enjoy being a part of Earli SIG 19.

For any questions, please contact the SIG 19 coordinators or Newsletter editors who will be happy to help you.

We want to encourage a wide participation in SIG 19 and in the Newsletter. If you intend to contribute to the Newsletter, please take into account the following issues. You can make suggestions concerning to content of the SIG 19 and the Newsletter. However, the editors retain the rights to alter and modify the contributions.

Interviews:

In each Newsletter we will focus on one or two researchers connected to the SIG 19. One of the covered researchers is preferably a junior researcher. Please do not hesitate to make suggestions concerning the interviewees.

Reviews:

In this section the SIG members can review different things, such as, books, articles and conferences, etc. Please do not hesitate to contribute and to present also your own works. A review should not exceed 250 words.

Special feature:

This section we feature some interesting and inspirational aspect concerning the SIG 19 areas of interest. The author is invited by the editors with regards to the suggestions by the members. The contributions should not exceed 500 words.

Announcements:

If you feel that there is something relevant happening in the interest areas of SIG 19, please use this section. Such things are up-coming conferences and projects. This section can also include propositions for shared projects. The announcements should be 100 words at maximum.

New members:

We wish new members warmly welcome to our SIG 19! We will list the new members in this section after we have been informed by them.

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