

Dear reader,

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion and Education* on 26 Apr 2012, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13617672.2012.650034>

Original publication:

Schweitzer, Friedrich/Simojoki, Henrik/Moschner, Sara/Müller, Markus

Researching Religious Education Journals: Methodology and Selected Results from a German Study

in: *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion and Education* 33(2012), vol. 1, pp. 83–93

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2012.650034>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Published in accordance with the policy of Taylor & Francis:

<https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/research-impact/sharing-versions-of-journal-articles/>

Your IxTheo team

Published in: Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion and Education 33 (2012), 83–93.

Friedrich Schweitzer/Henrik Simojoki/Sara Moschner/Markus Müller

Researching Religious Education Journals: Methodology and Selected Results from a German Study

Abstract:

This article is based on a research project concerning the development of religious education as an academic discipline in Germany during the twentieth century. Applying a methodology that has been of growing interest in a number of fields, the project proceeded by analyzing major religious education journals for the time between 1900 and 1975. The present report focusses on the procedures developed and used in this research project in order to make it available to others in other countries. This is why the procedures are described in detail while the material results of the study are presented only selectively, to the degree that they indicate the results that can be reached by the methodology applied, and give readers an impression of how general theories of modernization, professionalization, scientification etc. can be used for interpreting the development of religious education as an academic discipline. The authors suggest that research of this kind may eventually create a better basis for international comparative research in religious education.

Introduction

The following report is based on a research project that was carried out at Tuebingen University in Germany. Its focus was the development of religious education as an academic discipline during the twentieth century. The materials studied were major German religious education journals from the time between 1900 and 1975. The present report focusses on the procedures developed and used in this research project because the methodology might be of interest for similar projects in other countries. Material results will only be presented selectively, to the degree that the general outlines of the project will become understandable and that readers can see what kinds of results such a project may yield.

This project can be seen in the context of a growing interest in this kind of research. Recently, other studies of this kind have been conducted in Germany (Roggenkamp-Kaufmann 2001). Moreover, the American journal *Religious Education* and the *British Journal of Religious Education* have been subjected to a comparative analysis based on a period of ten years (English et al. 2003; 2005a; 2005b). Such research indicates that the analysis of religious education publications is a promising enterprise that can be quite stimulating for the further discussion. This has also been the case in other fields of study where similar kinds of analysis have been conducted (for example in general education, Hoffmann-Ocon 2009).

The Project

The main goal of the project was to trace the development of religious education as an academic discipline in the twentieth century in order to reach an understanding of this development that is more descriptive and more contextual than the standard accounts available in current textbooks (for example, Bockwoldt 1977, Sturm 1997). The project included a comparative analysis of Protestant and Catholic religious education (Protestantism and Catholicism are the major denominations in Germany). The immediate object of analysis were the discourses in leading journals of religious education in Germany that were evaluated empirically and analytically. The project equally referred to the discourses in Protestant and Catholic journals, making use of the observations and results for purposes of comparison (cf.

Schweitzer 2004 on interdenominational comparisons in religious education). The developments related to the two denominations were similar in some respects and different in others—a presupposition for meaningful comparisons.

It is important to understand what we mean by “discourse” in this case. Traditionally, most renderings of the history and development of religious education have used a different approach. They work by focussing on so-called main representatives, leading scholars, or “classics” of religious education (for example, Schröer & Zillesen 1989, Meyer-Blanck 2003). In contrast to this, we worked with a much broader set of data including publications that, following the standard classification, might be considered of secondary importance or quality. Yet while many of these publications have since been forgotten, they may still have played a role at their time—after all, someone assumed that they deserved to be printed—and they may be more indicative of what the majority of the members of the guild were thinking at a particular time. As can be seen from this approach to the material selected for analysis, we were interested in what kind of views of religious education can be considered as a common or shared understanding by many or most authors contributing to the ongoing discussions that found expression in print in major journals of religious education. In this way, we were able to include not only a handful of so-called classical publications but also many different voices that tend to be overlooked and forgotten in later accounts.

The design used in our research project has important implications in terms of understanding religious education as a discipline. In our understanding, there are good reasons to assume that the development of any discipline can hardly be understood by exclusively looking at a few chosen authors and their lasting contributions as classics. Just as in other cases, we should be aware of the so-called scientific community that has been influential in giving shape to religious education as an academic discipline by functioning as a carrier of its development, for example by taking up and thus validating certain ideas—or by not doing so. Even before the era of peer-review systems, the acceptance of an article for print certainly was an important part of this communal process of validation. Moreover, any description or analysis of the development of religious education must be mindful of the contextual nature of this development in terms of social and cultural influences.

While a more detailed description of the methodology used in the project will be given in the following section, a first brief description may be in place here as well. The journals used in the project were chosen because of their central role in the religious education discussion at the time. In the end, we identified one major journal on the Protestant side and one major journal on the Catholic side as our main sources but also included, in less detail, a number of other periodicals. Methodologically, the project proceeded on the basis of a model of qualitative content analysis on the one hand, and a quantitative statistical approach on the other. The content analysis had to be qualitative since its focus was on the theoretical aspects in the materials analyzed. Quantitative aspects in our study mostly referred to the authors contributing to the discourse (Who is writing in the journals? What is their professional background? What is their institutional and geographical location?, etc.). This kind of analysis allows for a better understanding of the different theoretical and practical contexts from which the different contributions emerged.

Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative results formed the basis for the descriptive results of the project. Finally, this description was followed by an interpretive part that made use of different theoretical backgrounds against which a number of hypotheses concerning the development of religious education in Germany could be discussed.

The material results of the project have been published in German in two major volumes (Schweitzer & Simojoki 2005; Schweitzer, Simojoki, Moschner & Müller 2010) as well as in a number of specialized articles (Schweitzer & Simojoki 2007; 2008; 2009, Schweitzer 2011).

Since the question of methodology is the focus of the present article, these results will not be reported here in detail.

Methodology

Identifying the Material Object

The main sources of the project were two journals—on the Catholic side the *Katechetische Blätter* that have been in print continuously throughout the twentieth century (with the only exception being the year 1945) and on the Protestant side, first the *Monatsblätter für den evangelischen Religionsunterricht* and then the *Evangelische Erzieher* as well as a number of other journals that can be considered precursors of our main sources. Since the project covered the period between 1900 and 1975, 150 - 200 volumes or approximately 60.000 – 80.000 pages of material had to be covered.

The reason for limiting the analysis to the time between 1900 and 1975 were, in the first place, pragmatic. Even with the generous support of the German Research Foundation (DFG/*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*) and the generous resources made available to us by them, it took us several years to complete the research. Beyond such external limitations there also were good reasons for starting after the turn of the twentieth century. The first decades after the year 1900 were the time when the new discipline intentionally called by the new name of “religious education” was introduced in Germany. Many authors at that time were convinced that the new or, as important spokesmen called it in the journals, “modern” religious education should take over from traditional catechetics that were considered dated and unsuitable for the future.

While the new religious education prevailed, at least to some degree, until the early 1930s, it was then replaced by other developments that were more related to theology. Consequently, even the term “religious education” was not used very often any more. In the 1960s, however, religious education was invented anew, not necessarily by returning to the ideas of early twentieth century religious educators but still in somewhat similar ways. This reinvention of religious education started a process of establishing the discipline in its new shape that took at least until the mid-1970s. This is why our project could come to an end with the year 1975.

In other words, the project tried to trace the development of religious education as an academic discipline within a period of time defined by this development itself. There can be no question, however, that such definitions can be contested and that the decisions connected to them are not innocent. Thus, another recent German study tries to show that the so-called traditional catechetics of nineteenth century Germany was in fact quite modern and that future studies on ‘modern religious education’ should therefore also include the tradition of catechetics (Käbisch & Wischmeyer 2008). Similar points can be made concerning the scope of journals as the main source. While there are good reasons to assume that journals started to play an important role in the field of religious education around the turn of the twentieth century in Germany (Schweitzer & Simojoki 2009), it remains true that certain monographs also continued to be of major influence. Moreover, institutional aspects deserve attention of their own in the context of the development of academic disciplines (Schröder 2009).

The journal-based approach clearly has its clear merits but we do not claim that it should be the only approach used in this field.

Research Procedures

As mentioned above, the project included qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Qualitative (Content) Analysis

The qualitative analysis proceeded by assigning the material, i.e., the articles in the journals, to approximately 40 different categories that allowed for further interpretation and comparison. These categories were identified in several steps. We started out with a number of categories that were based on the existing secondary literature (historical and systematic accounts) as well as on our interest in the development of religious education as a discipline. These heuristic categories were then applied to a limited number of the annual volumes of the journals under study, thus creating excerpts (approx. 10 to 25 pages per volume/year). The results were discussed by the whole research team and the categories were adjusted and refined where needed. These meetings also served the purpose of assuring some degree of congruence between the different researchers who were in charge of producing the excerpts. Moreover, key publications identified by the individual researchers were read and discussed by the whole team as well. This procedure was repeated several times in order to adjust the categories to different time periods. For example, the question of how authors refer to the period of National Socialism was highly important after 1945 but, evidently, not very meaningful before 1933.

Since the categories used are of core importance for the research procedures we render them here in detail.

The final version of the categories is divided into three sections. The first section refers to foundational questions of religious education as an academic discipline:

- The understanding of religion.
- The treatment of the material content and of subjective aspects in religious education.
- The relationship of religious education to its institutional and societal presuppositions: (1) the church, (2) culture and society, (3) state and politics, (4) the family. Special attention was given to the reactions in religious education to changes in society, politics and religion that can be grasped through phenomena like totalitarianism, democratization, secularization, pluralization.
- The ways in which ideological concepts, influences and tendencies related to National Socialism were treated: antisemitism, racism, nationalism, ethnocentric worldviews. Special attention was given to how the Old Testament was seen and evaluated. For the time after 1945, the focus of the analysis moved to how National Socialism as a time of injustice was treated.
- The importance attributed to one's own denomination for the theory of religious education on the one hand, and the ways in which other religions and denominations were seen, on the other, including ecumenism and interreligiosity. The different locations for religious education that are presupposed or mentioned explicitly and the different fields of religious education addressed.
- The relationship to other academic disciplines, especially theology and education but also the social sciences (psychology and sociology), for the time of National Socialism also eugenics.
- Explicit statements on the foundations of religious education in terms of a philosophy of science.

The second section refers to the educational programs represented in the journals, including different aspects that were of interest at different times.

- The relationship between state, church and school.
- The legitimacy of religious education at school, the reasons produced for it and the consequences for the actual shape of the subject.
- The legitimacy of a denominational orientation of schools and of religious education
- The professionalization of religion teachers, also including the relationship between clergy and lay people on the one hand, and priests or ministers on the other.
- The institutionalization of religious education as an academic discipline.
- Views of the process of reconstruction after 1945 and of the educational reforms in the 1960s.

The third section concentrates on questions of didactics.

- Views of the aims, contents and methods of religious education.
- Views of the relationship between teachers and pupils.
- Meaning of denominational influences for the actual teaching process at school.
- General didactical views that were given special attention and weight in the journals.

In order to understand how the authors located themselves and their publications in relationship to the historical context, we also carefully documented (in additional categories) what they said about developments in politics, culture, mentalities, the history of church and religion.

Finally, programmatic texts written by the editors (among others, in editorials) were analyzed with special care.

Quantitative Analysis

The understanding of the development of religious education as a discipline must also include the question of the personnel in charge of teaching and research in this field. Therefore we broadened the qualitative approach by including the different authors in the journals in our research. Who were these authors? Where were they located, geographically and institutionally, and what were their qualifications or degrees?

This kind of research proved to be more difficult than expected. In some years, respective information about the authors was printed on the cover or on the back of the journals, yet in other years this was not the case. In addition to this, the libraries where the sometimes rare copies of the journals (for example, from times of war) are kept did not preserve the covers when they put the different issues together into the bound volumes. Yet after many hours of detective work, a considerable rate of author identification could be reached (approximately 80% of the authors have been identified).

As an example, we render the results for the professional background of the authors in the Protestant journal *Der evangelische Erzieher* between 1959 and 1975.

Table 2: The professional background of the authors publishing in *Der evangelische Erzieher* 1959–1975

	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
Academic context	8	13	8	7	9	16	8	21	18	15	15	14	20	12	18	23	14
University	3	9	2	4	6	11	5	19	14	10	4	6	9	7	9	13	7
<i>Pädagogische Hochschule</i> (Teachers' Training Institution, University of education)	4	2	4	2	2	4	2	1	4	3	7	4	5	2	5	6	4
<i>Kirchliche Hochschule</i> (University of the church)										1			1	1			
Other	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1		1	4	4	5	2	4	4	3
School context	6	9	8	8	5	2	5	5	10	8	5	2	2	3	2	1	1
<i>Gymnasium</i> (Secondary school)	5	6	7	6	3	2	5	2	9	8	4	1	2	1	2	1	
<i>Realschule</i> (Middle school)	1		1														
<i>Grund- und Hauptschule</i> (Primary school)					1			1	1								
<i>Berufsschule</i> (Vocational school)														1			
(Advanced) Teacher training		1															
Other		2		2	1			2			1	1		1			1
Church context	8	6	3	1	3	2	4	6	7	1	5	7	5	2	2	2	6
Ministry	4	4		1	1	1	1	3	4	1	2	4	2	1	1		6
Church leadership	3		2				2	2	3		2	3	2	1	1	2	
(Advanced) Training			1		2	1		1			1		1				
Other	1	2					1										
Other professional context	2		1	3		1	1	1	3	1			2	1			
Not ascertainable		3	7	5	6	1	2	1	4	3	5	5		4	1	2	1
Authors altogether	24	31	27	24	23	22	20	34	42	28	30	28	29	22	23	28	22

Interpretation

The results from the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study were combined in two steps.

First, they were used as the basis for a rich description or historical account of the development of religious education as an academic discipline. In order to broaden the standard accounts available in the textbooks, we did not rely on the identification of certain models of religious education—like liberal approaches, theology-centered approaches, problem-oriented approaches—that textbooks usually describe as the elements of a sequence which is then called the “history of religious education”. Instead, we followed a more historical procedure by using the different epochs of German twentieth century history as our scaffolding—the *Kaiserreich*, the Weimar Republic, National Socialism, the post-war situation, the Federal Republic of Germany—thus emphasizing the historical and contextual nature of this development.

In a second step, we tried to interpret the descriptive account of the development of religious education as an academic discipline against the background of social and cultural changes described analytically and theoretically, among others, by social scientific theories of modernization or, in the case of National Socialism, by political theories of totalitarianism. Following the model of an earlier study comparing the development of religious education in the United States and in Germany (Osmer & Schweitzer 2003), we applied a challenge-and-response-understanding to our findings. Academic religious education should not be reduced to a product of social circumstances but should be understood as an active—and often creative and sometimes critical—response to the changing world around it.

Since we will present some of our results from this last step of interpretation in the next section of this article, we just mention the different theories that we used as lenses in this part of the study:

- social and cultural modernization
- professionalization
- scientification (the increasing influence of scientific theories and research)
- religious pluralization
- privatization of religion (separation between church or religion and the state).

Selected Results

The space of a single article does not allow even for a condensed rendering of the research results included by the two monographs that came from the project (Schweitzer & Simojoki 2005; Schweitzer, Simojoki, Moschner & Müller 2010). Yet it will be of help for understanding our approach to at least present some of the more general insights to be gained from our interpretations. Needless to say, these interpretations apply to religious education in Germany. Given their limited basis, they cannot be generalized to other contexts (in the next section of this article, however, we will raise the question of their use for international comparative research).

(1) From our point of view, social and cultural modernization was in fact the major influence on the development of religious education as an academic discipline. Especially after the turn of the twentieth century, industrialization, urbanization, increased mobility of the population and similar changes brought about a situation that religious educators felt had become

increasingly overwhelming for the religious traditions and institutions. A new approach was needed that was called “modern religious education”. In Germany, the two wars—World War I and World War II—as well as National Socialism certainly do not fit the picture of a continuous process of modernization. It makes sense that “modern religious education” was replaced by different, more traditional approaches in the 1930s. Yet in the 1960s, the general situation again changed in the direction of social and cultural modernization. It was no coincidence, that the return of religious education took place at that time.

(2) Another powerful influence was the professionalization of the religion teachers. This process brought about the audience and readership needed for academic journals in particular and for religious education as an academic discipline in general. In turn, this new discipline held the promise of strengthening the social status of those who had availed themselves of its academic degrees. During the first half of the century, the teachers did not only read but, to some degree, they also wrote the articles in the journals. Especially since the 1960s, however, the authors in the journals have a clearly more academic background. Instead of professionalization, we could call this the academization of religious education.

(3) The increasing influence of scientific methods—of empirical research but also of the impact of natural science and of the social sciences—is characteristic of the discourses in religious education documented in the journals. We call this the scientification (*Verwissenschaftlichung*), thus indicating the close relationship of this process to the general influences of modernization. At least to some degree, religious education strives to become a research discipline, by producing its own research (or at least by claiming to do so or by demanding it for the future) and, more so, by taking up the research from general education and the social sciences on the one hand and from modern theology on the other.

(4) Another way of looking at the changing shape of religious education is to link it to the changing religious landscape. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, religion in Germany has become much more pluralized and individualized. In the beginning of this period, it was more customary to refer to secularization. Yet more and more, although quite hesitantly, the secularization hypothesis was replaced by some kind of appreciation of the new pluralism observed in society (Schweitzer 2011). In any case, the traditional methods of catechetical instruction as well as the close relationship between religious education and theological dogmatics were seen as obstacles that had to be overcome if religious education should have a future.

(5) Separation between church/religion and the state is often seen as a basic requirement of democracy and of equality. Even those countries in Europe that still have a state church have moved away from the traditional fusion of state and church and have turned into liberal democracies. In Germany, the separation between church and state was reached with the Weimar Republic (in 1918). This implied a completely new situation for religious education as well. Ever since, the place of religious education in state schools has been under debate. New models and understandings of religious education had to make sure that their design would also make sense to those who are not in favor of any church influence within state sponsored institutions.

Perspectives for the Future

So far, our own study appears to be the first and only one of its kind in the field of religious education (with the possible exception of Roggenkamp-Kaufmann 2001 and Schlag 2010).

Yet a number of conversations with international colleagues, among others from the United Kingdom (Rob Freathy/Exeter and Stephen Parker/Worcester, also see their related statement on the use of historical research in religious education, Freathy & Parker 2010), indicate the possibility that this kind of research could offer a basis for international comparative research in religious education (cf. Schweitzer 2004).

Such comparisons would presuppose that similar projects will be carried out in other countries that have a comparable literature of religious education journals. In the UK, the journal *Religion in Education* did not start before 1934 but, for example, the *Hibbert Journal* published a number of foundational articles on religious education before then. In the United States, the journal *Religious Education* started in 1903 (with interesting parallels to the German situation, cf. Osmer & Schweitzer 1997). Other countries may have similar traditions that have not yet been researched.

Researching religious education journals could also become a step towards a more extensive discussion on religious education as an academic discipline, in terms of its understanding of research, its methodologies, its academic standards, etc. In this respect, the advantage of using journals as an object of study can be seen in reference to existing work rather than to mere ideas, claims or wishes for the discipline.

Notes on the contributors

Friedrich Schweitzer is professor of religious education, faculty of Protestant theology, University of Tübingen, Germany; Sara Moschner and Henrik Simojoki are lecturers with the same institution; Markus Müller is lecturer in church history, faculty of Catholic theology, University of Frankfurt, Germany.

References

- English, L. M./D'Souza, M. O./Chartrand, L. 2003, A 10 Year Retrospective of the BJRE: An Analysis of Contents and Contributors. *British Journal of Religious Education* 25, 308-319.
- English, L. M./D'Souza, M. O./Chartrand, L. 2005. Analysis of Contents, Contributors, and Research Directions: Mapping Publication Routes in the Journal. *Religious Education* 100, 6-19.
- English, L. M./D'Souza, M. O./Chartrand, L. 2005b. Comparative Analysis of the Research and Publication Patterns in *British Journal of Religious Education* and *Religious Education*. *Religious Education* 100, 193-210
- Freathy, R./Parker, S. 2010. The necessity of historical inquiry in educational research: the case of religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education* 32, 229-243.
- Hoffmann-Ocon, A. 2009. *Die Deutsche Schule“ im Nationalsozialismus* (Die Deutsche Schule 10. Beiheft). Münster: Waxmann.
- Käbisch, D./Wischmeyer, J. 2008. *Die Praxis akademischer Religionslehrerbildung. Katechetik und Pädagogik an der Universität Jena 1817 bis 1918 mit einem Forschungsausblick von Michael Wermke (Praktische Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart 5)*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Meyer-Blanck, M. 2003. *Kleine Geschichte der evangelischen Religionspädagogik, dargestellt anhand ihrer Klassiker*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Osmer, R.R. & Schweitzer, F. 1997. Religious Education Reform Movements in the United States and in Germany as a Paradigmatic Response to Modernization. *International Journal of Practical Theology* 1, 227-254.
- Osmer, R.R. & Schweitzer, F. 2003. *Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization. New Perspectives on the United States and Germany*. Studies in Practical Theology. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans.

- Roggenkamp-Kaufmann, A. 2001. *Religionspädagogik als „Praktische Theologie“*. Zur Entstehung der Religionspädagogik in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Schlag, T., Horizonte demokratischer Bildung. Evangelische Religionspädagogik in politischer Perspektive (Religionspädagogik in Pluraler Gesellschaft 14), Freiburg u.a. 2010.
- Schröder, B. (ed.) 2009. *Institutionalisierung und Profil der Religionspädagogik. Historisch-systematische Studien zu ihrer Genese als Wissenschaft*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Schröder, H. & Zillesen, D. (eds.) 1989. *Klassiker der Religionspädagogik*. Frankfurt am Main: Diesterweg.
- Schweitzer, F. 2004. Comparative Research in Religious Education: International-Interdenominational-Interreligious. In: R. Larsson & C. Gustavsson (eds.): *Towards a European Perspective on Religious Education. The RE Research Conference March 11-14, 2004, University of Lund*. Skelleftea: Artos & Norma, 191-200.
- Schweitzer, F. 2011. No Pluralism– No Diversity? Religious Education’s Response to Pluralization in Germany in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century. In: E. Foley (ed.) forthcoming.
- Schweitzer, F. & Simojoki, H. 2005. *Moderne Religionspädagogik. Ihre Entwicklung und Identität*. Freiburg & Gütersloh: Herder & Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Schweitzer, F. & Simojoki, H. 2007. Erziehungswissenschaft und Religionspädagogik im frühen 20. Jahrhundert. *Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung* 13, 139-166.
- Schweitzer, F. & Simojoki, H. 2008. 60 oder 100 Jahre „Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie“? Zwei religionspädagogische Zeitschriften und ihre Programme. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie* 60, 375-386.
- Schweitzer, F. & Simojoki, H. 2009. Religionspädagogische Zeitschriften als Spiegel der Institutionalisierung von Religionspädagogik als Wissenschaft. Befunde – Perspektiven – offene Fragen. In: Schröder, B. (ed.). *Institutionalisierung und Profil der Religionspädagogik. Historisch-systematische Studien zu ihrer Genese als Wissenschaft*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck., 441-464.
- Schweitzer, F./Simojoki, H./Moschner, S./Müller, M. 2010 *Religionspädagogik als Wissenschaft. Transformationen der Disziplin im Spiegel ihrer Zeitschriften*. Freiburg: Herder.