



SIG 19 Religious and Spiritual Education Newsletter

Issue 01/2017

Dear SIG 19 members and friends,

Welcome to the spring 2017 issue of our Newsletter! Joining the Newsletter editorial team, we introduce to you Eva-Maria Leven and Nasibeh Hedayati as new editors. Many thanks to Marjaana Kavonius for her great work as an editor!

In this issue, you find information about the SIG-conference last September in Siegen, Germany. Ulrich Riegel gives some impressions of the conference and we have some photos. We are happy to introduce an interview with Stefanie Lorenzen and Maximilian Broberg who both participated in the conference and give insight into their personal highlight during their stay in Siegen.

Furthermore, we have a new contribution to our section "Spotlight on Research" that presents current research on the field of religious education in SIG 19 member countries. We turn our spotlight on Finland. For the future issues, we kindly invite you to present current research projects in your countries and give our members and friends insight into your projects.

At the end of the spring 2017 Newsletter you will find important information about SIG 19 membership and a list of the latest publications by SIG 19 members.

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SIG 19 newsletter editors



Ulrich Riegel

SIG 19 – Coordinator

Dr. Ulrich Riegel is Professor of Religious Education in the Department of Catholic Theology at the University of Siegen. His recent research is on formal and informal processes of learning in church buildings, competencies of RE teachers, and the spiritual quality of Sunday activities. All these projects are empirically, using both, quantitative and qualitative methods.

Elina Kuusisto

SIG 19 – Coordinator

Dr. Elina Kuusisto works as a University Lecturer (ma) at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland. She is also a Docent of Education at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests include moral and religious education and teacher education. Currently she is studying growth mindset, ethical sensitivity and life purposes.



Dan Fleming

JURE – Coordinator



Dr. Dan Fleming is Dean of Studies and Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics at The Broken Bay Institute in Sydney, Australia. His research interests include moral philosophy, theology, religious education, and moral education. Most recently Dan has been focusing on the origins of moral responsibility in dialogue with philosophy and theology, as well as how it is that religious experience and worldview contribute to the formation of moral understanding and commitment. His work at The Broken Bay Institute draws him into dialogue with teachers of religious education from all around Australia.



Katharina Kindermann

Newsletter Editor

Katharina Kindermann is a PhD student and works as a research assistant at the department of Catholic Theology / Religious Education and the Department of Primary Education at the University of Siegen. Her research focuses are students' learning processes in the church building and RE teachers' subjective theories about field trips. She uses qualitative and quantitative methods.

Eva-Maria Leven

Newsletter Editor

Eva-Maria Leven is a member of the SIG 19 since 2013. She organized the SIG 19 conference 2016 in Siegen together with her supervisor Ulrich Riegel. She is a PhD student and works as a research assistant at the institute of Catholic Theology for the department Religious Education and Practical Theology at the University of Siegen, Germany. Her research focus is RE teachers' competencies in planning, conducting, reflecting RE lessons. She uses qualitative methods. As a lecturer she concentrates on learning with (new) media and art in RE as well as on "theology of/with" children and teenagers.



Nasibeh Hedayati

Newsletter Editor

Nasibeh Hedayati is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, the University of Helsinki, Finland. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, her research investigates life purposes' of Iranian students and teachers as well as moral dilemmas in the context of Iranian schools. You can learn more about her research in the new section 'spotlight on research'.



SIG19 CONFERENCE Religious and spiritual education

Impressions of the conference

The venue of the biennial SIG 19-conference in September 2016 was Siegen, Germany. We met there to discuss and exchange ideas about the conference theme '*Experiencing Religion and Religious Experience in Religious Education*'. Initial point of the conference was to deconstruct conventional terms of religious education in the light of temporal secularization and religious pluralization; with the primarily goal to sound out conceptual requirements for a viable term of religious experience in current society.

The presentations were organized in three clusters that covered the three essential components of the conference theme. The first cluster was dedicated to the term religious experience and enlightened it in different conceptual and contextual ways. The presentations in the second cluster dealt with empirical approaches to individualized religious experience. Finally, in the third cluster the consequences of a revised term of religious experience in religious education were discussed. The four keynote speakers gave important inputs to the first cluster, with a religious-sociological talk from Ann Taves (USA), an anthropological approach from Carles Salazar (ESP) and two presentations from Vasiliki Mitropoulou (GRE) and Manfred Pirner (GER) that were dedicated to media education.

All in all, 34 researches from 11 nations participated in the conference. It is the international alignment that was one gainful factor of the conference. Furthermore, researchers from different disciplines worked together on the conference topic. This international and interdisciplinary exchange enabled to unfold different facets of the conference theme that are enormously valuable for the discourse in religious education.

However, a conference is more than professional discourse. Meeting in Siegen was a great opportunity to network with colleagues, to meet friends and to have a nice time together. We enjoyed the wonderful conference location in Siegen and had unforgettable moments at the social program. Finally I would like to thank all those people who gave their help and support to organize our conference, first and foremost Eva Leven who cared about our conference participants in prior and during our three days in Siegen.

I am looking forward to meeting you at the next SIG-conference.

Ulrich Riegel

Photos of the conference



Welcome to SIG 19 Conference



Conference Room at Haus Patmos, Siegen (Germany)



Carles Salazar



Manfred Pirner

Keynotes

Ann Taves



Vasiliki Mitropoulou





Coffee Break



German Dinner at Krombacher Brewery



Life purposes of Iranian secondary school students

Nasibeh Hedayati, Elina Kuusisto, Khalil Gholami & Kirsi Tirri

Having a sense of direction in life has a crucial role in young people's positive development. Many researchers, mostly Americans have investigated Youth's life purposes (e.g. Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Considering the unique situation of Iran as a highly religious state which resulted in an ideological educational system, we wanted to know whether cultural and contextual differences effect young people's purpose in life or all youth nowadays pursue the same goals.

We collected the data from two Iranian schools, one male and one female school in Tehran, Iran, 2016 as schools are segregated by gender in Iran. 337 secondary school student (female $n = 174$, male $n = 163$) who were between 12 to 16 years old were given paper questionnaires translated in to Farsi.

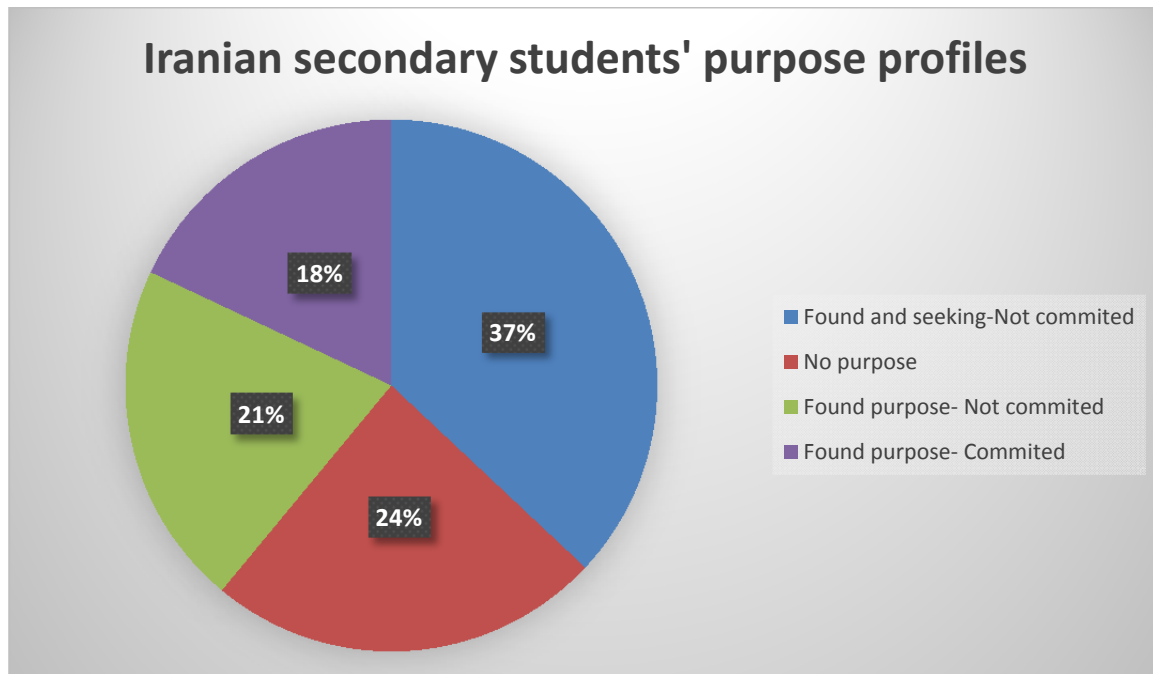
The data analysis shows that Iranian secondary student are highly interested in pursuing economic and hedonistic life purposes and they mostly value having a good relationship with family and siblings. Further, Iranian male and female students' aspirations were similar. Only statistically significant difference was found in aesthetic goals: Females were more interested in artistic aims (such as music, writing, acting and dancing) than males.

Iranian secondary students' life purposes

1	Economic and hedonistic
2	Family and Relationships
3	Social and Religious
4	Aesthetics
5	Acting in public life

In order to identify purpose profiles of Iranian secondary students, a cluster analysis was conducted. 37% of Iranian secondary students found purpose yet they wanted to keep their options open and continue to seek for new possibilities but they don't seem to be certain of their commitment to their purposes. Second largest group (24%) had no sense of direction and were not even active to find purpose in their life. And (21%) had been able to identify their purposes but they are not involved in activities toward their purpose. Smallest cluster (18%) belonged to those who had found their life purpose and they were highly committed in realizing it. This result is in line with both Finnish and American studies of purpose that the dominant profile was that of those who seem to have found some purposes, but continue to seek new ones (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2016; Damon, 2008).

Our results can be a useful guide for educators to provide useful support for young people to find a sense of direction in life and take meaningful steps toward it. In addition, since little is known about young people's life purposes in Eastern countries, this study helps to identify the varieties and the effect of different cultures on youth's purpose.



Reference

Damon, Menon, & Bronk (2003). The Development of Purpose During Adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7, 119–128. doi: 10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_2.

Tirri, K., & Kuusisto, E (2016). Finnish student teachers' perceptions on the role of purpose in teaching, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 42(5), 532-540.

This research is going to be published as a journal article.



Name: Stefanie Lorenzen

Position: Lecturer for Religious Education

Institution: University of Bern

Country: Switzerland

Research key words: Development of (non-)religious viewpoints, convictions, positions ("faith")

Developing new teaching-material (eg in the area of biblical and interreligious learning)

Qualitative empirical research (esp. Grounded Theory)

1. What started your career as a researcher in the area of religious and spiritual education?

After having done my PhD in New Testament Studies, I became a teacher for Religious Education in Secondary Schools (Gymnasium). There, I learned to ask about the actual relevance of theological topics and texts – the very centre of didactics: I like the challenge to think about problems in a very fundamental way without losing contact with everyday world. So, I was glad that I had the opportunity to deepen my understanding of didactics by working as an assistant with Bernd Schröder and Karlo Meyer at Saarland University.

Besides the didactical approach to theological topics, I was (and still am) interested in the very basic questions of religious and spiritual development in pluralistic contexts. The core question for me (that also is a central point in my habilitation) is: How do people develop their (non-)religious standpoints or convictions and how do they explain them to others? What kind of support can we give in contexts of Religious Education to build up "own positions"? What should such "positions" look like (in a formal sense)? Should there be a difference between the goal of holding a certain position and developing a (non-)religious identity?

2. What, in your opinion, is the most important area for religious and spiritual education research today?

I suspect nearly everybody sees the necessity to pay more attention to the area of Migration – but what exactly does this mean with respect to Religious Education? Pondering this question, I became aware that maybe it is time to reconsider some “old-fashioned” concepts: ecumenical learning and ethical learning are key words that are prominent since the seventies but came a bit out of sight during the last years. They are worthy to be transformed in light of the challenges we are to face in the next decades.

Together with this goes the task to do more basic research in the field of value-building and the development of spiritual and (non-)religious identities. With regard to my habilitation, I would stress the challenge to develop concepts of Religious Education that match with the growing number of people that consider themselves neither religious nor non-religious but rather something “in between”. Religion has faded to be a clear identity marker and turns out to be something situational, flexible, depending on different social contexts. Which forms of Religious Education are able to correspond to these changes?

3. What was your personal highlight at SIG 19 in 2016 at Siegen?

SIG 19 was my first international conference – so the main experience for me was exactly to see how this international perspective changes common (“national”) views on subjects, for example on the German model of Religious Education in school and its “confessional” or “denominational” basis. It challenged me to think of this model in a new way, in fact, as something very special and not at all “normal”. I became aware of the manifold cultural and historical conditions that are bound with the different concepts of Religious Education in Europe.

On the other side, it was very interesting for me to see that there were some presentations – concerning for example Religious Education in Germany or Sweden – that observed a fundamental uncertainty of teachers how to deal with the implicit or explicit demands of “religious neutrality” – especially when it comes to topics that might be a source of conflict. And last but not least: I really enjoyed inspiring discussions with researchers from all over the world during spare time.



Name: Maximilian Broberg

Position: Doctoral Student

Institution: Uppsala Universitet

Country: Sweden

Research key words: religious education, sociology of religion, media, secularism, discourses

1. What started your career as a researcher in the area of religious and spiritual education?

It is remarkable in a sense how chance and opportunity sometimes place people in seemingly random locations. If someone would have told me when I started my academic career at the teacher training program in Uppsala some 10 years ago that I would end up as a PhD student in the sociology of religion, I would probably have laughed at the idea. And though in hindsight I can see some background variables, such as my mother being a teacher and me being generally interested in religion, it is more likely because my bachelor thesis supervisor told me that I was quite good at this and should stay for a Master's degree rather than go work as a teacher. I happily complied. As chance had it, a position as a PhD student in a project financed by the Swedish Research Council presented itself, I applied, and got the job. So, quite a boring story really, I never knew I wanted to be a researcher until the opportunity to become one presented itself. Now, however, I love it.

2. What, in your opinion, is the most important area for religious and spiritual education research today?

It would be a cliché to say my own research is the most important right? Alright, I won't say it. However, exploring how mediated representations of religion plays a part in conditioning the way RE teachers plan and execute their teaching (which is part of what we are doing in the project) is to me definitely 'up there' with the other 'most important' areas of research. How, what, when and why do teachers bring various forms of media into the classroom? Are media discourses on religion reflected in the way teachers talk about religion? Are these discourses challenged or reproduced in the classroom? At least in Sweden, these questions are related to questions of normative secularism, immigration and integration, islamophobia, othering, and much more. I find it oh-so interesting.

3. What was your personal highlight at SIG 19 in 2016 at Siegen?

Apart from visiting the Krombacher brewery? Let's see, I really enjoyed Alexander Unser's presentation on how students' religious experiences are related to how well they perform in RE. Though perhaps not surprising in itself, displaying it using quantitative data really highlights the difficulties of creating a RE 'for everyone'.

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SIG 19 NEWSLETTER: NOTES AND GUIDELINES

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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EARLI SIG 19 MEMBERSHIP – HOW TO JOIN US?

To become a SIG member, you must first become a member of EARLI. For more information, please visit the EARLI website: <http://www.earli.org/>

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