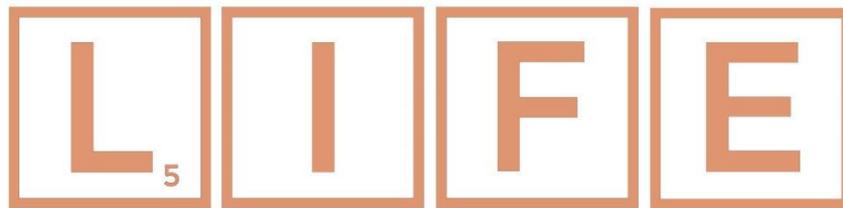




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## Learning Interculturality From rEligion



# RELIGION EDUCATION IN BULGARIA DESK RESEARCH

*Center for Educational Initiatives*

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## **Definition of the religion (Council of Europe)**

In Europe, freedom of religion or belief is notably protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

According to Council of Europe, “Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values”

Under international law, FoRB (Freedom of Religion or Belief) has two components: (a) the freedom to have or not to have or adopt (which includes the right to change) a religion or belief of one’s choice, and (b) the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, individually or in community with others, in public or private, through worship, observance, practice and teaching. (Council Conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, 21 February 2011).

In line with these provisions, the EU has recalled that "freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, applies equally to all persons. It is a fundamental freedom that includes all religions or beliefs, including those that have not been traditionally practised in a particular country, the beliefs of persons belonging to religious minorities, as well as non-theistic and atheistic beliefs. The freedom also covers the right to adopt, change or abandon one's religion or belief, of one's own free will." (Council Conclusions on Freedom of religion or belief; 16 November 2009)

In 2007, in Toledo (Spain), international experts of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) developed Guiding Principles for Religious and Belief Education in Public Schools.

According to European experts, the teaching of religion in modern school makes sense when respecting the right to freedom of religion and belief of all participants in the education process and when stereotypes of alienation and confrontation are successfully overcome.

The Toledo Guiding Principles recommend "training for religions", but each country chooses to take into account its specificities in the context of tolerance and human rights. (Ivanova, T. 2010)

## **Religion education in Bulgaria**

Education in the Republic of Bulgaria is of a secular nature, and teaching of religion in Bulgarian schools has a long and varied history. There are legal as well as moral and educational prerequisites for it, and the constantly changing image of European societies in the context of the continuous process of migration and an increasing diversity of traditions, cultures and religious beliefs and the emergence of new categories such as pluralism, European citizenship and cultural racism over the past few years also require rethinking the



model of education. This is related to many discussions and disputes that have been going on for over a decade, but there is still no full consensus on these issues.

There is no single model and standard for teaching religion in European countries. A common feature of European countries is that religious education in most countries is either optional, or students can choose between a number of subjects with different confessional or non-professional profiles (Bogomilova. N. by Plesner 2004).

According to a number of documents issued by the Council of Europe and their commentators, the purpose of teaching religion in civic schools is European integration - identifying and establishing at least the common values presented in the European Convention on Human Rights, realized with respect, preservation and development of regional and national cultural elements (Bogomilova. N. by Jackson 2007).

As a subject of study Religion was introduced in the Bulgarian schools during the academic year 1997-1998. From 2003 to the present time, religion is studied as a subject of compulsory and/or elective preparation of students from the 1st to 12th grade and is realized according to the wishes of the student (his/her parents) and the ability of the schools to provide qualified teachers. The curriculum complies with the educational requirements in the country.

Religious education in Bulgaria takes place in five spiritual schools - two spiritual seminaries and three Muslim schools. In these schools, apart from general subjects, religious disciplines are also extensively studied.

The next stage of religious education takes place in higher schools. The Faculty of Theology at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" was founded more than 70 years ago. In June 1950, it was separated from the Sofia University as a Spiritual Academy, which is disadvantaged compared to other higher schools in the country. It was only in July 1991, with the political changes, that the status of the Faculty of Theology was restored. This change brings back the dignity of higher theological education. New theological faculties were established at the universities of Veliko Tarnovo, Shumen, Blagoevgrad and Kardzhali. (Kozhuharov, V. Orthodox Education in Didactic Light, Veliko Turnovo, 2001).

In Bulgaria there is also a Higher Islamic Institute, established in 1998, based on the Religious Denominations Act. This is the first independent high school of Muslims in Bulgaria, which is defined as a high school of the Muslim denomination in the country. However, the Higher Islamic Institute and its majors are not accredited by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria.

From this academic year at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" a new Master's program "Religion in Europe" has been introduced. "The program is aimed at preparing two profiles of specialists in the three monotheistic religions - Christianity, Islam, Judaism, which in varying degrees have affected the formation of the culture and civilization of Europe over the centuries. The aim is students to acquire solid knowledge



about them in comparative theological terms, which ensures insight into the religious diversity on the map of modern Europe."

### **Teaching the school subject “Religion” is based on the following acts of legislation:**

According to the **Constitution**, religious faiths in the Republic of Bulgaria are “free”

(article 13, paragraph 1), the religious institutions are separated from the State (article 13, paragraph 2), and the traditional religion is the eastern orthodox faith (article 13, paragraph 3).

The equality and respect to other religions, the free right to practice a religious faith, its protection as well as the legal status of religious communities and institutions and their relations with the State are covered in the **Religious Denominations Act** (article 4, paragraph 1).

School education is codified in the **Law on Pre-school and School Education** (published in Official Gazette, issue 79 of October 13, 2015; in force since August 1, 2016), which defines pre-school and school education in Bulgaria as “secular” (article 11, paragraph 1) and “does not allow the imposition of ideological and religious doctrines on students’ education” (article 11, paragraph 2).

In the process of school education “religions are taught in historical, philosophical and cultural prospective through the learning content of different school subjects. Under the conditions of the above act, the school subject “Religion” can be also taught in the course of school education” (article 76, paragraph 4).

The school subjects under paragraphs 1,2,3,4 and 6 – to which the school subject “Religion” belongs – are taught in learning programs approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The learning programs determine the number of hours for teaching a specific school subject.

There is also a still existing **Instruction № 2 of June 23, 2003** concerning the training on the subject "Religion" which defines the conditions and order for teaching the school subject "Religion". It states that "pupils from the first to the twelfth grade have the right to study the subject" Religion "in the classes of compulsory and/or elective preparation" (Article 2). The organization of training on the subject "Religion" takes place in compliance with:

1. the desire of the students;
2. the capacity of the municipality and the school to provide qualified teachers;
3. the Concept of Education in the Subject "Religion" in the Comprehensive Schools of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Concept of Education of Muslim Children in the Subject "Religion - Islam" in the Comprehensive Schools (Section 2, Article 3), approved by the Minister of Education and Science.



## Teachers' qualification

According to the MES (Ministry of Education and Science) instruction, teachers who have the right to teach the subjects "Religion" and "Religion-Islam" must meet one of the following requirements:

- To have higher education in the field of "Humanities" - professional field "Religion and theology";
- Primary school teachers who have completed a course of study at faculties of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria
- or persons who graduated from the Higher Islamic Institute (Article 11).

## International conventions ratified by the Republic of Bulgaria:

- Freedom of Religion and Conscience (1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18);
- Religious Tolerance (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 26, § 2);
- The right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 14, paragraph 1).

## The last decade

Between 2006 and 2009, there was a growing interest in the topic of religious education in Bulgaria. There is an intensive discussion on the topic of religion at school and changing the status of the subject from optional to compulsory.

Two basic concepts are formed about the nature of the subject and the program, tailored for the different classes.

The first one is expressed by the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), which proposes the subject to be called Religion-Orthodoxy, with emphasis mainly on Orthodox faith.

The second concept was drafted by the Council for Religious Education at School, led by Prof. Georgi Bakalov from the Faculty of History at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The proposed concept complies with the then state-educational requirements and corresponds to the concept of the historical-philosophical nature of the subject. The main goal of this subject, according to the curriculum, is to give pupils knowledge in the religious sphere, to develop respect for religion and, as a result, to lead to an adequate value orientation and tolerance in this area.

Prof. Claudia Sapundjieva, Head of the Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Affairs at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in her article "On Religion, Values and the Bulgarian School" (published in 2017), analyzes the two proposed concepts. She states that:



Both concepts do not call into question the necessity of obligatory study of religion in the Bulgarian school. They both base their motives on the need to renew the spiritual and moral upbringing of the students. The main difference is the understanding of the meaning and approach to the study of religion - as knowledge, cultural enrichment (practically religion is a new general subject of education) or as a preferred religion studied in a confessional way, but also with an option to choose for those who prefer the non-confessional study. The Ministry of Education and Science also has some share for this difference, at least as far as its mandate is concerned - for non-confessional and pluralist teaching of religions, or a free/obligatory subject in which parents themselves decide whether and what religion to choose for their children.

In 2005, various forums were organized. They were dedicated to the problems of religious education in Bulgaria.

The last public discussion on this topic was held in Varna in 2007: Public discussion on Orthodoxy and Religious Education in the General School, organized by the Varna and Veliko Preslavtsi St. Mitropolies, attended by representatives of different dioceses, experts on the subject "Religion" from the Regional Inspectorates of Education at the Ministry of Education and Science in Plovdiv, Rousse and Varna, as well as representatives of the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and the Orthodox Theological Faculty of Veliko Tarnovo University "St. St. Cyril and Methodius".

Detailed information about the discussion and the conclusions of the published reports can be found on the website of the Varna and Veliko Tarnovo St. Mitropolies where it is said that "all these events, which have taken place over the last few years, have sought to find appropriate forms of religious education for the children in the Bulgarian public schools. The participants in each of them came up with concrete proposals to the responsible state bodies of government, but so far no satisfactory solution to this public need has been found."

The topics discussed during the discussion are divided into four subtopics:

- Religious education in the European Union;
- Secular school, secular education and religious education and moral-ethical upbringing;
- Religious education in Bulgaria in the last 11 years - results of the teaching of "Religion" as elective subject and perspectives for its introduction as compulsory general education subject and alternative choice in civic education - subject "Ethics";
- Confessional and non-confessional teaching of the subject "Religion" in secular education - normative content, curriculum content, curricula, general methodology of teaching, textbooks, teaching aids and teachers.



The following conclusions have been drawn from the facts: the study of the subject of religion in all its forms and diversity in Europe nowhere contradicts the secular nature of education in the EU and human rights and religious education does not contradict the Declaration the UN Human Rights Charter, the European Charter of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

According to the report on the second topic of the forum, the "neutral" teaching of the history of religions is impossible but also harmful to the growth of the personality. If the child does not learn affection at an early age, he is likely to accept racist and anti-humanistic ideologies when he grows up. "

The study points out that "there is no purely secular education - every ideology contains sacred elements and that the Bulgarian pupil perceives" too vaguely "the ideology of universal human values. It is mentioned that "the European Union itself is now clarifying its values. For now the only clarity is the obligatory tolerance. Here is the contradiction. Tolerance is only possible at clearly established limits."

In the report of Mr. Evgeni Gunov, expert on Religion at the Regional Inspectorate of Education in Plovdiv, the following facts were pointed out: "During the past (2005-2006) school year Religion was studied by 16,667 students and the teachers were 290. The number of children wishing to study the subject is growing, but unfortunately, the two forms of study in which they are taught are difficult to implement because they depend on many factors. The main question that is being discussed today is how to study the subject of religion? - whether mandatory or optional? "The report also concluded that" both forms have their advantages and disadvantages.

The report of the Sofia Diocese on the subject under discussion states that "confessional training should take its place in the Bulgarian educational system" and that "there has always been religious tolerance in Bulgaria. The history of Bulgaria does not know religious clashes or civil wars on a religious basis. In this sense, our homeland has for centuries observed the newly formulated European values of mutual understanding and tolerance.

At the end of the public discussion the participants drafted and signed an address addressed to the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, to the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, to the Ministry of Education and Science and to the media. In this Statement a number of conclusions have been made and all the conclusions made during the discussion are reflected. The text of the document states: "There is a great lag in the study of religion in Bulgaria. The analysis of eleven years of experience in teaching the subject "Religion" in both forms of teaching has shown that they are difficult to work because they depend on many objective and subjective factors.



In 2009, Valentin Kozhuharov's book "Religious Education in the European School System Today" was published. The study tracks the organization and functioning of religious education in public schools in Europe, with data for 33 countries being presented. The book

looks at religious education in its various aspects and functions as a subject in public schools. On the basis of the facts analyzed, a religious and pedagogical justification of this subject is made in the schools in Europe and the main problematic issues of the teaching of religious knowledge in the secular school are outlined.

The outline of the religious education in Bulgaria is compared to the facts of individual European countries and the contemporary requirements for the subject Religion, which should be solved if this subject is to be introduced as regular in the Bulgarian state and municipal schools. (Article New Book on Religious Education, source: Orthodoxy, BG, 16/07/2009).

According to Dr. Valentin Kozhuharov, "Although the upbringing and spiritual growth of children is taken into account in the process of learning, this is above all" reporting "when we report, not actual education and adequate moral training." (Kozhuharov, B 2009. Religious education in the European school system today, Veliko Tarnovo, p.9).

In 2010, Nonka Bogomilova's book "The Religious Diversity in the Culture of Modern Europe" was published, describing and analyzing various layers of the problem of religious diversity and religious pluralism in the culture of modern Europe.

The available articles and analyzes clearly highlight the need for more public discussion. The need to hear the opinion of all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, politicians and intellectuals) and to make a representative survey of attitudes. In her article Prof. Sapundjieva says that such a study is "necessary to repeat the same (updated) methodology in order to outline the picture of public attitudes, parents' preferences and children's interests in order to compare the results and to track the relevant dynamics."

The last such study was conducted more than ten years ago by a team of the Sofia University, commissioned by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Prof. Sapundjieva notes, however, that the study conducted "is aimed at justifying the Conception of the Council of Religion and does not include data on other opportunities and views, as well as the attitude of the public towards them. In addition, a deeper study of the reasons - especially parents' attitudes - is needed, for example, to find out whether behind their positive attitude there is no possibility of alleviating their educational efforts by transferring an even greater part of the responsibility for bringing up children to the school."

In 2015 Nonka Bogomilova, DSci, Professor at the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in her article "Problems Of Teaching Religion In Public Schools In Bulgaria Today: Retrospective And Prospective", published at Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe (OPREE) made an conclusion that the in Bulgaria "wide public discussions are necessary, familiarity with the trends, and preliminary provision of educational conditions for effectuating the European solution."



## **A brief history of the subject Religion in school**

The worldly character of the Bulgarian school is announced by the Provisional Statute for National Schools in 1878, approved by Prince Dondukov - Korsakov. From then until 1944, the subject of the Law of God / religion was studied at school, which did not interfere with the already established secular nature of education. The training was conducted by qualified teachers, and later by priests, and the textbooks were controlled by the Holy Synod. 281 textbooks were published.

After 1944, however, political changes took place in Bulgaria, leading to a change in educational policy. At the beginning of 1945, religion dropped out of the curricula of primary and pedagogical schools. The next school year was only facultative, one hour a week in primary and junior high schools. In January 1946, the temporary education minister, Dr. Racho Angelov, ordered the school to remain in a neutral position with respect to the church. With the 1947 Constitution and the 1949 Religious Denominations, religion definitively dropped out of the curriculum of public schools.

The idea of restoring religious education in the Bulgarian school was reborn after the political changes of 1989. Since 1997, concrete actions have been taken to develop a concept for the introduction of the subject of Religion.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education and Science set up a Religious Commission to create concepts, curricula and textbooks. Representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) had objections to the name, content and manner of introduction of the subject, thus offering religion as a compulsory subject, respectively, with different educational content and confessional teaching. The Commission rejected these proposals and reaffirmed the concept of the experimental introduction of a single subject for religion. The curriculum for all grades of the general school was determined, teaching materials for students were prepared and the specialists who would teach religion - graduates of philosophy, Bulgarian philology and history were chosen. For Primary Teachers at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University they started courses in post-graduate specialization in theology.

In 2000, the Religious Affairs Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science developed normative and methodological guidelines and affirmed two forms of teaching the subject Religion: Religion-Christianity and Religion-Islam. That is how the subject is taught today.

## **Intercultural education in Bulgaria**

On the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, people with different religious beliefs and cultures coexist. In the latest census report, the National Statistical Institute announced that on the issue of religion, "the share of non-respondents was the highest - 21.8%, among young age groups (NSI, Census, 2011).



According to the latest survey of the National Statistics Institute (2011):

The persons who identified themselves as Eastern Orthodox Christians were 76.0% of the respondents. The Catholic religion indicated 0.8%, Protestant -1.1% of the respondents. The Muslim denomination has 10%. Other denominations confess 0.2% of respondents. No religion - 4.7% and 7.1% are not self-identified.

In 2015, an analysis was published on "Acceptance of EU Policies for Integrating European Values for Tolerance and Human Rights in School Education at a National Level". It reviews the UNESCO Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance. "The UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education" was signed on March 17, 2015 by the Ministers of Education of all EU Member States as "Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education".

The analysis examines how and to what extent all of the above mentioned commitments of EU education ministers in diverse national contexts (Bulgaria, Finland, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Norway and Macedonia as control examples outside the EU) are being realized and what is the type of good European policies and Education practices in tolerance, non-discrimination and intercultural understanding from an early age. The main objective of the analysis is to present the Bulgarian case in a comparative perspective with the European countries concerned.

According to the report, initiatives to raise awareness of the protection of human rights, non-discrimination and tolerance of diversity and multicultural dialogue in the educational content of the state educational cycle in Bulgaria date back to the pre-accession period.

Various projects are being implemented to develop a European dimension in Bulgarian education. Analyzes are made on the adequacy of state educational requirements and on the need to modernize state education for learning content and teaching aids. The analyzes also point to a number of contradictions emerging when looking for ways to introduce civic education as a subject in the education cycle.

So far, however, no analysis and policy decisions have been made in the sector focusing on the first years of education as crucial for the systemic development of the child's social values and relationships, and respectively - with a priority on the visual (text-based) content of textbooks as the main factor at this age. To develop and maintain their sense of tolerance for differences and adaptability in a diverse cultural environment.

The new Law on Pre-school and School Education sets out among the main objectives of the sector the acquisition of "competences for understanding and applying the principles of the rule of law, human rights and freedoms, active and responsible citizenship participation"; the formation of "national and civic self-awareness and of tolerance and respect for the ethnic, national, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of every citizen"; the formation of "tolerance and respect for the rights of children, pupils and people with disabilities"



According to the report with the new law, "for the first time in the legislative framework explicitly includes the integration of intercultural education in general education, which is mentioned in three places.

### **Pedagogical approaches**

While writing this report on the history of Religion at the Bulgarian School, the laws and the different perspectives in the existing analysis, our team held informal conversations with educational experts and parents to follow their attitudes and opinions on religion education and organized a focus group discussion for discovering the approaches and the needs.

Information about the pedagogical approaches has also been found in several published articles.

Svetla Ang. Shapkalova in her article "The pedagogical experience in an education of interreligious tolerance" she reveals a co temporal pedagogical experience in religious education and upbringing of students in primary schools and those from universities concerning their skills and knowledge's about interreligious tolerance. According to Shapkarova, "the curriculum of other subjects can fit into religious education. The integrative tendency is not only theoretically possible but also practically fully applicable". The article describes specific models for the application of the subjects of religion in the following disciplines: Bulgarian language and literature, mathematics, manual labor, music, etc. Based on hers many years of experience, the author states that "religious knowledge should be developed with the students in a free spirit and should educate tolerance to the others."

As an innovation in teaching religion, we could present an educational program on the integration of knowledge about religions in the first, second, third and fourth grades, adopted as an innovation at a meeting of methodological unit - "Primary Teachers", realized in class. The practice is realized in "Vasil Levski" Secondary School - Krumovgrad, Kardzhali.

The aim of the program is to build behavioral models in the school in harmony with Christian and Muslim values and morals, to build dialogue and communication skills based on the Christian and Muslim understanding of man, his place in the world, the community and the relationship with his neighbors.

In the description we also find an example curriculum, a description of METHODS of work in pedagogical practice, organization of open lessons. Advantages of the presented practice are presented compared to the standard approaches.

### **Focus group discussion**

The main objective of the discussion was to analyse the main focal points related to the changes and evolutionary trends referred to religious education and what they think about the issues related to:



- The impact of multiculturalism on religious education
- Didactic innovation
- Their experiences and practices

The discussion was led by a moderator and included primary teachers from two different schools and a parent.

### **Summary**

The discussion was held at the Center for Educational Initiatives. Initial teachers from two schools in Sofia (5 in total) were invited. The pupil's parent was also involved in the discussion. They all agreed in advance that their opinions would be recorded. Conclusions made after the meeting are based solely on the views of the participants and we cannot guarantee that they reflect the general opinion of the discussions.

After a brief presentation by the moderator, including the study of the religious education in Bulgaria, it has become clear that the topic is extremely interesting for colleagues and that some of the presented data are new to them. The need for more discussion on religion-based teaching methods and the positive attitude towards the opportunity to get acquainted with the project model became clear.

### **Key findings**

Most of the questions discussed did not differ considerably. In their view, education in religion has a place in school, but not as a compulsory subject.

In the informal talks with different experts, and during the focus group discussion it became clear that the general opinion is that the Bulgarians are not religious people. The reasons were not discussed. On the other hand, if parents wish their child to study religion, they could enrol in Sunday school. In addition, the school leadership, in case that there exists interest of pupils and parents, can include a free choice subject. Religion will not be necessary taught, but there is no obstacle to including it in the curriculum. In this sense, there should be no particular problem.

In addition, the subject of religions has always been present in teaching materials and different subjects, but is not called "religion". Most of the curriculum is based on studying the various holidays and the life of "other" cultures. In the tutorials for the initial stage, there are various elements and songs that help children learn about different cultures.

Two opinions were raised on whether the public is willing to talk about religious education and about introducing a separate subject. Some of the teachers believe that our society is not yet ripe. For this reason, they exclude the option of including the subject as mandatory. According to them, people (and most teachers have some reluctance and concern when it comes to religion) On the other hand, one of the schools has introduced Religion as an elective subject and colleagues share the positive acceptance by parents as it is obligatory for



each parent to present in writing their consent to their child attending classes, only a very small part of the parents did not give their consent.

The reasons for the disagreement, however, are not clear. During the discussion, colleagues told that they had not had a conversation with parents on this topic so far, but they were inspired to do so.

We had the opportunity to hear the opinion of only one parent. She was categorical that there was no need for religion to be taught. At the school of her child, they have recently introduced Religion as an elective subject. She has agreed the child to be included. But she said she did not know what the program would be. According to her, the history of religions should be studied, not specific. So far, however, she did not ask for the curriculum. She reaffirmed the view that people are so accustomed to the fact that religion is separate, that they do not imagine the opposite.

On the subject of the impact of multiculturalism, everyone agrees that the situation itself requires the teacher to change his approach. In the classrooms of all teachers there are children of different cultures. So want it or not - such a multicultural environment requires the teacher to rethink his approaches. In most cases, special classes are given in which children themselves tell about their traditions.

At the same time, additional questions arise - whether the hours allocated in the program are sufficient. Are teachers really prepared?

### **Comments**

Maybe we live in a time when we will have to rethink our attitude to religion. For this reason, there is no clear and precise answer to the questions asked. However, it is clear that there is a need for much more similar discussions, of support for teachers - additional qualifications, support materials and models to apply. In this regard, all teachers have expressed their positive attitude towards the idea and objectives of the LIFE project.



## 1. Case study: innovation in teaching religion

As an innovation in teaching religion, we could present an educational program on the integration of knowledge about religions in the first, second, third and fourth grades, adopted as an innovation at a meeting of methodological unit - "Primary Teachers", realized in class. The practice is realized in "**Vasil Levski**" Secondary School - Krumovgrad, Kardzhali.

The aim of the program is to build behavioral models in the school in harmony with Christian and Muslim values and morals, to build dialogue and communication skills based on the Christian and Muslim understanding of man, his place in the world, the community and the relationship with his neighbors.

The project is called "*Knowledge Of The Religion - "Education For Ethnic Religious Tolerance In School"*"

**Abstract of the program:** In recent years, the crisis of Bulgarian education has been identified as a particular one a current issue in various aspects. One of them requires a change to the attitude towards education. The school must form the understanding of the students that the elements of uniqueness are characteristic of all cultures around the world that to a certain extent every culture is different from ours and cannot be understood without being studied.

That is why the purpose of this pedagogical practice consists in studying pupils' readiness towards tolerance and understanding of the two main religions in the area, in order to reach the notion that religion, independently what he is, he teaches only good and tolerant. Examples of elements of the curriculum are used contents in the cycle of learning subjects in the initial stage with students from the first - fourth grade - representatives of the four ethnic communities - Bulgarian-Christian, Turkish-Mohammedans, Bulgarian-Mohammedans and other and other ethnic groups.

**Practice Description:** Introduction and inclusion of students from 1-4 grade to the knowledge of faith within the curriculum of Bulgarian language and literature, public and natural sciences and arts, in accordance with the State Educational Standards and the curriculum of the relevant objects. Creating lessons and multimedia presentations to them students with major holidays and concepts of Christianity and Muslimism that they are related to Bulgarian history, literature, cultural holidays and national life.

In the description we also find an example curriculum, a description of METHODS of work in pedagogical practice, organization of open lessons. Advantages of the presented practice are presented compared to the standard approaches.

### **Advantages of the presented practice as compared to the standard approaches to work and training**

The presented practice aims to help create a creative environment in which students (83 in numbers) participate in the analysis of particular constructed situations and formulate positive patterns of behavior that are strive to follow in everyday life. There are tasks related to the



development of positive behavioral patterns designed to promote ethnic tolerance and reducing aggression and violence among students.

Within the individual lessons, tasks are included to validate constructive behavior that restricts forms of violence and harassment; creates a favorable climate in the classroom and a class that stimulates communication and development of students' communication skills.

There are not ready solutions but an opportunity to analyze the situation, which develops the emotional and social intelligence of the students, focuses on the need to understand other people and their needs, to learn to be cooperating with them.

**As an attachment, description of two themes:**

**Theme:** The otherness as a value. Development of interethnic relations - "The Crow and the Parrot" - / by Saadi / parable; "The White Dove" Marko Ganchev; "The Garden of Nations" Yosif Nunev.

**Purpose:** To address the issue of difference, of otherness.

**Materials:** Parable, poem, and fairy tale.

**Instruction:** The teacher tells (or reads) the parable "The Crow and the Parrot". Then this invites the participants to share what reflections the audience has created history, what qualities the heroes possess, know people with similar behavior allowing for the maximum number of speeches. Teacher summarizes and emphasizes the fact that intolerance to differences in public life is a way to discrimination. Regardless of its qualities (whether it is crow or parrot) one can develop arrogance to others and consider them to be inferior by yourself. Through the interdisciplinary relationship with the literature lesson on "The White Dove" Marko Ganchev emphasizes that it is not a shame to be different and how to we accept the different from us. This focus also applies to the work on the subject " The Garden of Nations" by Joseph Nunev.

**Activities:** Read through a task, answer questions, select reading. Working on the notion of tolerance: What is tolerance? Tolerance is a term that expresses behaviors, manners, approaches and attitudes of support, understanding and non-discrimination to minority or under-represented groups or groups that are in some way disadvantaged. Do we manage to be tolerant? Help with folk wisdom by linking the mixed words to the sentence: / envy, not who, sees /. Point out, share examples from our / your / everyday life.

**Theme: Different (conversation with a friend)**

**Aim:** To address situations in which the rights of another person are violated and where tolerance is important. The class is divided into groups in pairs and the rest are observers. One text is assigned to Role 1, and Role 2 to the other.



**Role 1:** You are Annie. She is a student at Vasil Levski University. Two months ago in your class came a new student who is of Roma origin. She does not speak well Bulgarian. You know she's a Muslim woman.

Once the teacher releases her from school for some of their religious reasons holiday. You do not like it. You cannot understand what he believes in. You think it might be better to leave your class. You are particularly annoyed when you start talking to incomprehensible to you with the new boy in the other class. You think they are discussing you. You trying to attract some of your girlfriends and make them make the number the new girl and set the class against her. Maya and Kremena agree, but Blaga refuses and starts to come out of you.

Yesterday he begs you to talk. You go to the appointment. Your tense, because you like Blaga very much and you're afraid of losing her like a girlfriend.

**Role 2:** Your name is Blaga. You are studying at the Vasil Levski Sofia University. Your new class has come recently a student who is of Roma origin does not speak well Bulgarian. You know it is Muslim because she does not attend school one day for a religious holiday.

You would like to contact her to learn about her religion. IN she speaks in her native tongue with the new boy from the next class. You will you know a word in this unfamiliar language. It's interesting to talk to her. She's cute careful. You are telling new things. But Annie, your girlfriend and classmate, shapes up a group of several girls around her and she starts to tease the new girl to him he insults and mocks him. Annie continually invites you too. You refuse and you start to you avoid it. You think such behavior is unfair. You decide to talk to Annie.

You set a meeting. Annie is approaching you fast. You're starting the conversation. Everyone learns their role well, then couples hold the conversation for which is mentioned at the end of the text. Observers choose their favorite.

Participants share their role-playing experience with the big group, what they think about situations.

**Questions:** Have you had such situations in your life? You interfere when that happens is it happening to you?

## 2. Case study: An open lesson on subject “Religion”

The Open lesson of a teacher of religion at a Bulgarian school, Mrs. Ruska Tosheva. The lesson is on the initiative of the Headmaster. Invited are: the mayor of the school area, Deputy Mayor of Education, Culture, Social Activities and Sport, professor of the Faculty of Theology and students.

Other schools in the same area have been also invited to show them in practice how religion is taught and the good example of the 20th primary school to find place in other schools.



The theme of the lesson was "St. George", but he did not confine himself to the saint's personality, but extended to the memory of his memory in the past and today, on the monasteries bearing the name of St. George, the miraculous icons, the military parade in his honor, the courageous orders of the name of the saint and his worship by other nations and faiths.

In the lesson, interrelationships were made with the Bulgarian language and literature, where students studied Bulgarian folklore and folk music.

The pupils freely co-operated with theological terms and showed solid knowledge, but that is not surprising given that they study a first-class religion. They presented their projects, which included the history, architecture, the present state of some of the great monasteries devoted to St. George, told about the facts they had impressed upon their research work.

Prof. Bozhidar Andonov expressed his joy at the successes of the teachers and students in the 20th Primary School, which is one of the few in Sofia, where religion is still being studied. He noted that only through the knowledge of our religion, our culture and traditions can we become involved in European values and participate dignified in the life of united Europe.

Then, at the meeting in the Headmaster's office, the mayor and representatives of the municipality expressed their satisfaction with the way of teaching religion in the 20th Primary School. They noted that the linking of the curriculum with the national culture, which Mrs Tosheva made, provided for the easy perception of religious values and morals by children and their parents. They regretted that the other school headmasters did not show the same openness and initiative to bring children to the foundations of religion.

In an interview, the director noted that for more than 15 years in the school the subject of religion was studied. "Even at the first meeting with the first-class parents, we say that religion is being studied at the school. Ms. Tosheva explains what the children will learn. Parents are happy to enroll their children. Units are those who refuse. So, from 1 to 4, we have 17 classes and 17 religion groups. After 4 grade, children want to continue studying the subject. They know the teacher, they like their hours, the atmosphere. "Bulgarian Language and Literature teachers in 5 grade cooperate with Ms. Tosheva, because in the curriculum there are included topics related to religion. "Then I notice that children draw conclusions on many of the issues we are considering in literature because they are familiar with religion," says Mrs. Doganjiyska.

The question of whether the organization of teaching a religion in a school is very difficult, and so the directors refuse, and replies: "The organization is not difficult. It is important to have a desire. We have a full-time teacher, there are enough children and hours and work goes." Teachers have agreed to study religion in schools only if the emphasis is on the cultural foundations of religion, values and morality, they do not want to be a doctrine because not every parent wants his children to become believers but just to know their own religion.



According to the headmaster today, schooling can not speak of religion as creed, it was possible in the past when the Church was strong, today, she thinks, education is more influential, so teaching religion must be in line with the new realities. In this connection, she noted that the Church is in charge of religion teachers in front of schools. "Almost no attention is paid by the Church of the Schools, I go, please priests to come to the water on September 15, invite them to our various initiatives, but most often they refuse to participate. Somehow the Church is segregated from the school, " she says.

Asked how parents perceive that their children know more about them on faith and religion, the headmaster replies, "There are parents who come to consult Ms. Tosheva on how rituals are done, which is right and what not. "According to the director, parents want their children to know about religion, there is an interest in the subject both on the part of adults and children. It is already a matter of organizing schools to provide a religion for their students.



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