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The role of lay people in religious education. The competency of correlation of the religious education teacher

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Abstract

The role of lay people in religious education. The competency of correlation of the religious education teacher

The quality of religious education in schools is primarily a matter of the quality of the religious education teachers. In this paper we want to explore different professional perspectives on the acquired competences of the religious education teacher and we want to focus our attention on his specific competency of correlation to linking faith and the life of pupils, Church and school, and Church and society. Therefore, we understand the religious education teacher as a “tightrope walker” who is able to maintain a balance between these different environments.

Keywords: religious education, teacher of religion, competences, lay faithful

Abstrakt

Rola osób świeckich w edukacji religijnej. Kompetencje korelacyjne nauczyciela religii

Jakość nauczania religii w szkołach to przede wszystkim kwestia jakości nauczycieli religii. W niniejszym artykule chcemy przeanalizować różne perspektywy zawodowe dotyczące nabywanych kompetencji nauczyciela religii i skoncentrować uwagę na jego specyficznnej kompetencji korelacji w zakresie powiązania wiary i życia uczniów, Kościoła i szkoły, Kościoła i społeczeństwa. Nauczyciel religii rozumiany jest jako “linoskoczek”, który potrafi zachować równowagę między odmiennymi środowiskami.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja religijna, nauczyciel religii, kompetencje, wierni świeccy

The current religious-pedagogical debate – also in the context of the reform of the state curriculum for primary schools in Slovakia – concerns a change in the paradigm of religious education, which is oriented more towards the outputs than the inputs of education, and has paid its attention in particular to the competences of the pupils. However, the issue and the question of the competences of religious education teachers seemed to remain on the periphery of attention, although ultimately the quality of education depends more on the quality of teachers and their organization of teaching and learning than on the updated educational programme. But what do teachers need to know to ensure such quality? Are competences something that a teacher has, something that can be learned, something that is a given and that he or she must develop? Where will the teacher learn it and how will he or she learn it?

Various researches¹, that have dealt with the competences of the religious education teacher, bring about the desirable figure of a teacher who implements informed and demanding teaching and is competent in his subject. This means that the teacher of religion, although result-oriented, does not neglect the process of education and is sensitive to the individual problems of the children and young people to whom he or she offers help in life. In doing so, he does not only offer information about the biblical experience found in the tradition, but is oriented to the pupils' contemporary experience and enables them to learn independently, on their own responsibility and initiative, and by a variety of methods. Teachers are thus those who encourage, support and accompany the process of independent learning for pupils. This requires the activation of learning processes that are based on life, and an emphasis on learning outcomes acquired through cognition and reflection. This means that in the teaching of religion, faith is inextricably linked to life. Religious education teachers are literally “bridge builders”: they build bridges between the message of faith and the lives of pupils, between the Church and the school, between the Church and society, and between believers and non-believers. It follows that a religious education teacher needs to have sufficient correlative competence to hold together sometimes very

1 P. Kliemann, H. Rupp, *1000 Stunden Religion*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 49.

contradictory elements. Hans Mendl² therefore refers to the teacher of religion as a “tightrope walker” who is required to maintain a balance between the differing demands.

In this paper, we want to explore different professional perspectives on the acquired competencies of religious education teachers. In a particular way, we want to focus our attention on his specific competency of correlation, a role as a “bridge builder” and especially as a “tightrope walker” who is able to maintain a balance between different worlds.

1. Competences of religious education teachers

Historically, there have been very different ideas about what constitutes good religious education and, in this context, a good religious education teacher. According to different religious pedagogical conceptions, the idea of a teacher varies considerably in some cases: other competences require material-kerigmatic or hermeneutical teaching, others require problem-oriented or correlative teaching of religious education. And it is clear that the historical development of the religious education teaching profession can also be seen as a history of increasing professionalization in the tensions between Church, State, school, pedagogy and theology. However, this process of professionalization, in the sense of an intercommunicative, institutionally situated development of professional competencies, is, according to Bernhard Grümme³, crucial for teachers to avoid both purely intuitive action and the linear transfer of academically acquired knowledge into pedagogical practice. Academic preparation nowadays has to take considerably more account of subject-specific, pedagogical, psychological and didactic requirements strictly related to the professional field.

This means, in particular, the need to deal with the profession of religious education teacher as such. In doing so, research on the education and professionalization of the religious education teacher, according to

2 H. Mendl, *Handwerker, Künstler, Meister. Eine Problemstudie zum Erwerb eines professionellen Habitus*, “Jahrbuch für Religionspädagogik” 22 (2006), p. 69.

3 B. Grümme, *Der Religionslehrer als Seiltänzer. Zur Frage der Religionslehrerkompetenzen*, “Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift” 60 (2009), p. 79.

Stefan Heil and Hans-Georg Ziebertz⁴, provides us with several perspectives and conceptions. The personalistic conception highlights rather the individual aspect of the teaching profession and sees teacher education primarily as personality development. Being a religious education teacher is linked to the development of one's own personal faith. The conception that understands the religious education teacher as a social role emphasizes the interconnectedness of the teacher's role in the different, partly different expectations of different agents such as society, politics, the Church, school, pupils, colleagues. Rather, it is up to the religion teacher to create his or her own role identity in the web of expectations and possibilities that are associated with the different agents, e.g. his or her involvement in the Church, etc. The activity approach projects the professional activity of the religious education teacher in terms of everyday practice and the competences necessary for it. In doing so, the teacher's activity is defined by the categories of teaching and learning, which are still among the main activities of the teacher in current competence models.

Because competences are always domain-oriented and related to specific tasks, these general didactic considerations about the professionalism of the teacher figure must be concretized in terms of religious education. Different models of competence can be found for religious education. Nadja Ringel considers that competences in religious education depend on the situational circumstances and goals of religious education, on the principles underlying the religious teacher's actions, and on the individuality of the religious teacher as manifested in his or her actions. Ringel distinguishes between professional, didactic, psychological and personal competences. The professional competences include theological knowledge and theological reflection and judgment. This also includes the ability to show children what the Christian faith has to do with their lives and how theological content can be translated into the pupils' thinking. Didactic competence is important for independent planning, implementation and reflection in religious education. The religious education teacher also needs psychological competences

4 S. Heil, H.-G. Ziebertz, *Professionstypischer Habitus als Leitkonzept in der Lehrerbildung*, in: *Religionslehrerbildung an der Universität. Profession – Religion – Habitus*, Hrsg. H.-G. Ziebertz, S. Heil, H. Mendl, W. Simon, Münster 2005, p. 41.

for orientation in the world of children's lives and experiences. These psychological competencies include perceptual competencies and communicative competencies. Religious education teachers need to develop a culture of conversation and reflect on their communicative behavior in relation to the aims and content of religious education. Personal competences include, in addition to learning competences such as the willingness to reflect critically on one's own actions and to learn from pupils, above all an authentic witness to the Christian faith, as well as social competences⁵.

There are currently several catalogues of competences which are understood as the basis of professionalism for teachers of religion and which, despite all the changes in emphasis, show considerable similarities. On closer analysis, however, there is a need to clarify whether there is such a thing as a hierarchy of competences. Is there one competence that dominates the others and which eventually commands all the others as well? Different authors give different answers to this question. For Ringel, the person of the religious education teacher, his credibility and authenticity play a central role. Matthias Hahn and Rein-er A. Neuschäfer⁶, on the other hand, emphasize the dominance of professional knowledge and skills over personality and learning climate. According to Fritz Oser⁷, the competence of teachers to prepare clear and well-structured lessons is a decisive factor.

As we can see, the difference between personal and learning emphasis is considerable. The concept of the religious education teacher as a "tightrope walker" comes to the rescue, suggesting that the crucial correlative skill is to balance different and quite distinct elements and roles, and to unite what in fact appear to be incompatible elements.

5 N. Ringel, *Was ich nicht alles können muß. Religionspädagogische Handlungskompetenzen von Religionslehrer/innen an Grundschulen*, Essen 2001.

6 M. Hahn, R. A. Neuschäfer, *Kompetent für differenzierenden und individualisierenden Religionsunterricht*, "Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie" 58 (2006) H. 2, p. 136–148.

7 F. Oser, *Standards: Kompetenzen von Lehrpersonen*, in: *Die Wirksamkeit der Lehrerbildungssysteme. Von der Allrounderbildung zur Ausbildung professioneller Standards*, Hrsg. F. Oser, J. Oelkers, Chur-Zürich 2001, p. 215–342.

2. Religious-didactic knowledge as “religious-correlation competence”

Being and becoming a religious education teacher means acquiring and mastering professional knowledge and skills, confronting the underlying motives and convictions of the faith, and having the ability to use one’s own resources in a meaningful way. Being or becoming a good religious education teacher is not the same as being a good theologian or a strong believer. Although the professional competence of religious education teachers is related to theological expertise and is related to the pursuit of one’s own faith, it does not end there, but goes beyond it. Therefore, Mirijam Schambeck argues that religious-didactic knowledge, which is closely related to religious knowledge, should be considered as a decisive factor of teacher competence⁸.

Religious education, according to Schambeck, works differently in school than teaching mathematics or arithmetic. This is due to the different structure of knowledge in these two academic disciplines. Mathematical learning in school is characterized by a linear increase in complexity, from simpler to more complex. In religious education, the situation is different. Discussing the question of God with primary school children is perhaps even more difficult than with pupils, who, because of their cognitive developmental structure, find it easier to cope with the complexity of thinking. While mathematical learning in school is characterized by a linear increase in complexity, the discussion of theological topics is characterized by complexity present at the core. Thus, the better prepared teachers are in terms of religious and didactic knowledge, the more likely they are to deliver good lessons and the more likely students are to learn successfully⁹.

8 M. Schambeck, Was Relilehrer/innen können müssen: Religionsbezogene Korrelationskompetenz als Profilvermerkmal professioneller (Handlungs-) Kompetenz von Religionslehrkräften – eine Konzeptualisierung in den Spuren der COACTIV – Studie, “Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik” 17 (2018) H. 1, p. 129.

9 M. Schambeck, Was Relilehrer/innen können müssen: Religionsbezogene Korrelationskompetenz als Profilvermerkmal professioneller (Handlungs-) Kompetenz von Religionslehrkräften – eine Konzeptualisierung in den Spuren der COACTIV – Studie, “Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik” 17 (2018) H. 1, p. 130.

On the one hand, religious knowledge is identified with a domain of knowledge that, although not directly translated into teaching topics, is constructed by them. Teachers need to be able to justify and argue why certain facts are this way and not that way. From the point of view of theology as a specific reference discipline for religious education teacher, this means, for example, in questions about Christ, to know the importance and centrality of Christological questions for Christian faith, to know the plurality of Christologies and, depending on the teaching topic, to understand biblical and theological-historical contents in their contextuality and their lasting relevance for today.

However, religious-didactic knowledge has a more direct impact on the quality of teaching than religious knowledge alone, although they are not thinkable without substantial religious knowledge. Only religious-didactic knowledge, however, enables the design of teaching in such a way that pupils are cognitively activated. It is the area of competence with the greatest impact on pupils' learning success. At the same time, this does not mean that religious knowledge is unimportant for professional competence. Rather, it can be seen as a framework and a space that opens up or limits the possibilities for variation in religious didactics. In this context, it is also true that gaps in religious knowledge cannot be closed by religious didactics¹⁰.

However, Schambeck underlines that the competence of religious-didactic knowledge can be defined as "religious-correlative competence", the ability of the religious education teacher to represent religious traditions in their diversity and to explain them in relation to pupils. For the didactics of religion, this means that teachers of religion must have the knowledge and the ability to choose forms of teaching that open up cognitive and existential correlation processes and that pupils have the opportunity to know and understand theological interpretations and

¹⁰ M. Schambeck, Was Relilehrer/innen können müssen: Religionsbezogene Korrelationskompetenz als Profilvermerkmal professioneller (Handlungs-) Kompetenz von Religionslehrkräften – eine Konzeptualisierung in den Spuren der COACTIV – Studie, "Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik" 17 (2018) H. 1, p. 131.

to assess their relevance for life, to apply these interpretations to their own conception and shaping of life if they wish to do so¹¹.

3. The competence of reflexivity in the concept of pedagogical habitus in religious education

Stefan Heil and Hans-Georg Ziebertz¹² examined the issue of teacher competence in terms of the concept of pedagogical habitus. A habitus is a general underlying, externally perceived attitude or style of a person. Habitus is created by the subject, but at the same time it is always under the influence of external factors. Habitus is thus the place where the interaction between the subject and the outside occurs and where the individual style emerges through the subject's acquisition of it. It is shaped historically and biographically and allows for contemporary action within the horizon of this shaping. At the same time, however, the formation of habitus is never complete. It is always capable of development and open to the future, and therefore remains a constant challenge. The theory of habitus in religious education is able to show which demands of religious education influence habitus and constitute it in the first place.

This habitus is primarily constituted by structures of action. These are profession-specific rules that form the basis of professional practice and includes routines and the handling of new things. Routines are memorable patterns of a repertoire of actions that enable rapid and purposeful action. These routines are related to the roles of the teacher, such as counselling, teaching and educating. However, it is important that these routines remain open to new ideas. Otherwise, they risk becoming rigid and unable to meet the changing demands of everyday teaching with its ever-changing challenges. In addition, the habitus is also determined by the conditions of the action. These conditions both enable

¹¹ M. Schambeck, *Was Relieler/innen können müssen: Religionsbezogene Korrelationskompetenz als Profilvermerkmal professioneller (Handlungs-) Kompetenz von Religionslehrkräften – eine Konzeptualisierung in den Spuren der COACTIV – Studie*, "Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik" 17 (2018) H. 1, p. 140.

¹² S. Heil, H.-G. Ziebertz, *Professionstypischer Habitus als Leitkonzept in der Lehrerbildung*, p. 42.

and determine teachers' professional action. The conditions include the institution of the school with elements such as classification, time allocation, role models of the teacher-pupil relationship, curriculum or tenure. A person is not passive to these institutional conditions. The teacher's actions are already shaped by personal characteristics such as appearance, physique, posture, gestures, facial expressions, as well as intelligence, humor, communication skills, and academic background, and are an essential part of the interaction in teaching.

If we now look at the model as a whole, it is clear that the pedagogical habitus is built through competence and especially reflexivity. In order to act professionally, teachers must have the competence to build routines, to change these routines by engaging with new things, and to integrate personal as well as institutional conditions into their actions. In addition to these individual competences, reflexivity is therefore a key competence for the habitus concept because, as a "metacompetence", it is responsible for the integration and transformation of individual competences and their development as a contribution to the formation of habitus.

The concept of habitus as a way of taking balance between the structures of action and the conditions of action of a religious education teacher can help to analyze and further develop one's own professional thinking and action. It can explain what makes a religious education teacher a good and satisfied teacher. Heil and Ziebertz note, that the more congruent the patterns and conditions of activity, the greater the job satisfaction¹³. Conversely, it can be explained how disorders such as burnout syndrome arise. In this way, it can be helpful for the religious education teacher not to lose balance.

Nevertheless, in our opinion, the questions arise: is it not too much of a burden for the individual teacher of religion if he has to constantly maintain his balance, if he has to constantly work on his habitus? Does it not burden the teacher too much? Does this model not imply a conception of identity that is not sufficiently open to the violated, the unintegrable, the other? One could certainly argue in favor of the habitus model by pointing out that an essential part of it is entering into interaction. You never walk the tightrope alone. Supervision, collegial

¹³ S. Heil, H.-G. Ziebertz, *Professionstypischer Habitus als Leitkonzept in der Lehrerbildung*, p. 55.

mentoring, team teaching, collegial feedback, participation in working groups, in-service education and training events are essential.

Yet the question arises whether it is too much of a burden for an individual religious education teacher to have to constantly maintain a balance? One could certainly argue in favor of the habitus model by pointing out that an essential part of it is entering into interaction. You never walk the tightrope alone. Supervision, collegial mentoring, team teaching, collegial feedback, participation in working groups, in-service education and training events are essential.

Conclusion

In this paper, we wanted to explore different professional perspectives on the acquired competency of correlation of religious education teachers in terms of the need to connect and balance different worlds. It should be clear that the professional practice of a religious education teacher is a teaching focused on the competences on which the quality of religious education essentially depends. This competence-oriented teaching in religious education remains the task of lifelong learning, in dialogue with pupils and colleagues, but also in the face of permanent fragmentation and exposure. For we must not forget one thing that Anton A. Bücher points out that the essentials remain impracticable in the profession of religious education and has to do with enthusiasm or with what is called "vocation"¹⁴.

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¹⁴ A. A. Bücher, *Mehr religionsdidaktischer Realismus! Standards und Implikationen für die Religionslehrerinnenausbildung*, "Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie" 2 (2006), p. 123.

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