

The Theme of Religion in School Environment, Discussion with Teachers and Students

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This article deals with the topic of school and religion, it opens a discussion on the presence of spirituality in the school environment and brings an analysis of a survey research. The research was aimed at the area of values, culture and religion in the school environment. The problem was explored through qualitative research strategy. The respondent group consisted of teachers and students who are familiar with the topic of values and spirituality in the school environment. Thus, the group of respondents is selected purposefully and a grounded theory a qualitative research method was chosen. Data gathering was done by focus group discussions (four focus groups) which were transcribed and analyzed by open coding. At the beginning of the analysis it was necessary to establish individual terms that emerged from the discussion. Also, a certain reflection has been made about those terms, how are they viewed and what is “behind them.” The goal of the survey was to acquire statements from teachers and students about the situation in the school environment regarding the topic of values and spirituality as a part of the culture of recognition in the school environment.

Key words: school; culture of recognition; spirituality; teacher; pupil; religion; education; individual; questions; plurality; values

Motto: Religion must be something special that could fashion itself so peculiarly in the human heart, something thinkable, the real nature of which can so be presented as to be spoken of and argued about.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Basis

Religions and belief in God or gods are as old as mankind itself. One does not have to focus on the most significant cultures and civilizations from the beginnings of our time even in more short-termed and less impactful cultures we can encounter some level of stronger or weaker religious involvement. Mircea Eliade, a renowned expert in the history religious thinking, derives the term culture from religious experience and faith.¹ The same author has also elevated the importance of religion to the level of a fundamental condition for being human when stating that “on the most archaic levels of culture, living, *considered as being human*, is in itself a *religious act*, for food-getting, sexual life, and work have a sacramental value, in other words, to be – or, rather, to become – *a man* signifies being ‘religious’”²

Most of the experts in human history across the fields are in agreement (so far) that Western culture is based on Greco-Judeo-Christian-Enlightenment ideal. This ideal can be also called values. Values are critical for religion, culture, civilization and mankind and as such they are pulsating in their heart. Basic values of Western civilization emerged from five historical “miracles” and only Western culture went through all of them. According to Nemo those basic values are legal state, democracy, intellectual freedom and critical rationality, science and free economy. It is important to realize that none of these values is “natural” but that they are results of a long-term historical development.³

During the course of this development, the most significant were the classical period and the period of Christianity. Ancient Greece gifted Western civilization with the invention of polis, science, schools, legal equality and care about soul;⁴ ancient Rome law, personal ownership and the discovery of man.⁵ Christianity laid basis for ethics, has put mercy above justice, refused to consider evil as a normal part of life, consciously established the use of reason in form of Greek science and Roman law which resurrected and reconciled with biblical ethics, so the Roman law became more humane and ethics became less utopian but more oriented on real life.⁶ The fifth “miracle” was the birth of liberal democracy, desacralization of

¹ Eliade, M. (1984). *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 9.

² Eliade, M. (1978). *A History of Religious Ideas*. 2. *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, XIII.

³ Nemo, P. (2011). *Co je Západ?* Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 11–76.

⁴ Patočka, J. – Kouba, P. – Chvatík, I. (1999). *Péče o duši*. Praha: Oikoymenh.

⁵ Reale, G. (2005). *Kulturní a duchovní kořeny Evropy: za obrození evropského člověka*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 99–107.

⁶ Hanuš, J. (2017). *Jak mohou přežít hodnoty?: příspěvky ze senátní konference pořádané Centrem pro studium demokracie a kultury*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 18.

power and rise of pluralism and modernity. If we are inclining towards this view, we can see how many values of today's Western civilization has its roots in religion, in case of Euro-American culture in Judaism and Christianity, and how much it is present in our daily lives and influences them.

Inexhaustible amount of material has been written about the subject what is and what is not religion.⁷ Despite that, there are a lot of terms that are encoded into general knowledge which are often interchanged, misinterpreted or inadequately explained. This unfortunate confusion in the usage of the terms is probably a result of low awareness and education and also a result of still distorted historical memory of a nation that was ruled by a totalitarian regime (paradoxically exhibiting religious aspects).⁸

We should now ask the question whether religion belongs to Czech primary schools? What is its purpose and what challenges it must face? On university campus, religion and theology are present since its own beginnings. Students of theology usually study the selected religion for five years, students of religion acquire perspective about all "big" religions in the same time. Despite that one can ask – should it be in their case considered a science?⁹ Aside from science, there is also a faith as a personal gift and a personal declaration. How to approach a faith of each individual when viewing him as a participant of an educational process? There is also a significant question of religious practice when it is often common to have some private space of four walls reserved or a temple. In this case, religious conviction goes against the secular and enlightened way of thinking of a liberal state.¹⁰ This leads us to a non-insignificant problem of coexistence of religion in school and secular place as our country is.¹¹

Where does our country really stand regarding religion? Many research surveys have been done in the Czech Republic in past years. Quantitative methods

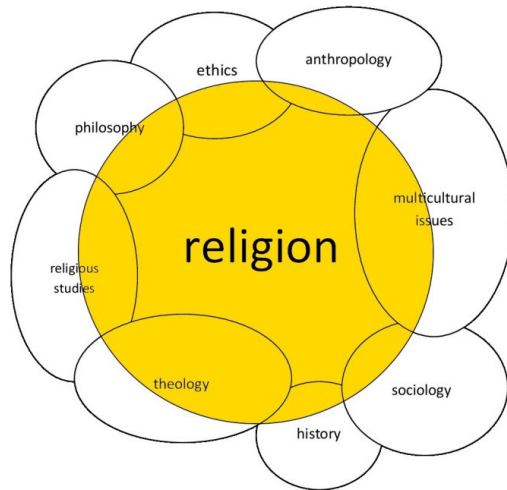
⁷ As a selection of usual examples of recommended authors, the following has been selected: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Küng, Eliade, Voltaire, Marx, Nietzsche, Dawkins.

⁸ On the subject of political religions more in: Maier, H. (2004). *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume 1: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*. Routledge; Gentile, E. (2006). *Politics as Religion*. Princeton University Press. Voegelin, E. (2007). *Die politischen Religionen*. Wilhelm Fing Verlag.

⁹ More in: Sládek, K. (2011). *Křesťanství a islám v liberálním státu: výzvy tradice a současnosti*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, or Sládek, K. (2009). *Monoteistická náboženství a stát*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart.

¹⁰ Sládek, K. (2011). *Křesťanství a islám v liberálním státu: výzvy tradice a současnosti*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 110–132.

¹¹ On the topic of Czech secularization: Štěch, O. (2017). *Náboženství a sekularita: zápas o veřejný prostor*. Praha: Filosofia; Hanuš, J. – Fasora, L. – Malíř, J. (2007). *Sekularizace českých zemí v letech 1848–1914*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury; Fiala, P. (2007). *Laboratoř sekularizace: náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury.



have been used by “secularists” while “sacralists” inclined more to qualitative methods of data gathering.¹² From this “natural” differentiation into two groups we can see a different perception of religion, where one group shields itself by using the correct procedures and scientific method referencing positivism and modernization theory, while the other group goes into sufficient depth to reach specific and unique phenomena and topics referencing phenomenology and interactionism.¹³

What can we conclude from the presented results? Quite convincingly the fact that we are a nation of believers. It is not just a faith as it is commonly understood. In the Czech Republic, there live a good few people who declare themselves as followers of eastern traditions, who believe in magic, horoscopes, afterlife, reincarnation, nirvana, oracles, psychics, who search different kinds of esoterism and delve into occult practices, pagan rituals or sympathize with new religious movements and sects. So, we can hardly describe our country as a nation of atheists but in terms of ecclesiastical religiosity we are one of the most secular countries in the world. The indicators of low religiosity in the Czech Republic are service attendance, formal declaration to any church and trust in churches. The awareness of Christian theology is minimal.¹⁴ Therefore the Czech example

¹² Droogers, A. (2007). Beyond Secularisation versus Sacralisation: Lessons from a Study of the Dutch Case. In K. Flanagan, P. C. Jupp (Eds.), *Sociology of spirituality*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 81–100.

¹³ Tichý, R. – Vávra, M. (2012). *Náboženství z jiného úhlu*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 14.

¹⁴ More in Hamplová, D. (2013). *Náboženství v české společnosti na prahu 3. tisíciletí*. Praha: Karolinum.

confirms the famous words of Chesterton's Orthodoxy or Thomas Luckmann that if religiosity is an anthropological constant, people when not satisfied with traditional religion will turn to alternative sources of transcendence and meaning of life.¹⁵

In the environment of Czech society and Czech school we are facing another religious challenge which is the area of spirituality and morality¹⁶, Schleiermacher says that we have morality, metaphysics and religion as three significant and necessary parts of human spirit.¹⁷ Religion at schools is supported by the historical and political (mostly at universities) argument and the argument of indispensability. Amongst others Jürgen Habermas, a philosopher who is undoubtedly not close to any church, says the following about the indispensable potential of religion (in the European context of Christianity in particular): "As Europeans, I do not think that we can fully understand terms like morality, person and individuality, freedom and emancipation [...], have we not appropriated the substance of salvational-historical thinking of Judeo-Christian origins."¹⁸ As one of the values that grow from the soil of morality we can name the value of truth which is nowadays often bended and distorted in media. How far do we deviate from Kant's moral imperative when we consider lie as something legitimate, in words of proven liar as "a different kind of truth"? Can religion and its ethical dimension unfold bigger inclination towards truth (even if we consider the predicament of Pilate), can it provide comfort and meaning of life in times of prevalence of evil, consuming pain or extremely unfavorable living conditions?

Despite the predictions of Voltaire about the end of religion within a century or statements half a century old that religious topics will be extinct in 21st century, the interest in religion continues. Islam will become one of the major election topics of several parties¹⁹ and will become the election topic that influences the public and virtual space. Who could foresee such a discussion a few years ago? The results of globalization are exhibiting themselves not only in connection to the migration crisis. Hundreds of thousands of people of different faiths and religions are beginning to move and it is very likely that we will meet them in our country more and more often. There is an opening space for the field of multiculturalism which is also vastly present in religion. Can we assume that gained knowledge

¹⁵ Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Invisible Religions: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. London: McMillan, 41–49.

¹⁶ On the topic of morality and school Muchová, L. (2015). *Morální výchova v nemorální společnosti?* Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury.

¹⁷ Schleiermacher, F. (1996). *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Habermas, J. (1988). *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze* (2. Aufl.). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 23.

¹⁹ More in Mareš, M. (2015). *Islámu ne! protiislámská politika v České republice*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury.

about in what, why and what percentage of the world population believes will lead to better understanding, acceptance and tolerance? Can it change the set false illusion in the minds of many, that religions are responsible for most of the wars around the world?

If we follow what was stated earlier, we can say that religion already is present at Czech schools and that it would be wise not to underestimate its potential. Nevertheless, the key question remains. How to teach about religion, how to think about it, how to approach it? Because for one group it is one of the most sensitive topics that touches the innermost areas of a human being and affects many people more deeply than any loyalty, dedication or solidarity, for other group it is an outdated and harmful thing that does not belong in modern society and for the rest it is something that leaves them completely indifferent.

Religion does not belong to school (?)

For a long time now, religion and school have not belonged together and to speak about them in connection seems to be inappropriate. The relationship between school and religion is full of prejudice and brings fear of “medieval practices”, “nonscientific knowledge”, fundamentalism or naivety.

In 2009, a group of people met at the Faculty of Education MU (FE MU). This group was connected by interest to create broader initiative which would allow for a discussion about religion in school environment, about religious and spiritual dimension of education. The aim was to pierce the circle of prejudice which surrounds religion in society, to show the reasons why to account for the presence of religious dimension of life at school and to possibly help to create space in which public and qualified debate about the presence of religious dimension in school culture could be held.

The aim of the initiative which is a partnership of Czech and Austrian teachers and has lasted until today is to point out a religious dimension as a quality of life that on its own is a value for the particular development of a democratic school, which is based on humanistic principles and pursues humane and dignified education. This initiative does not want to claim another historical right to Czech school system nor does it want to bring religion to schools or even spread a specific religion, it only wants to account for religiosity in its broader sense because it belongs to the general quality of every human life. Religion does not belong to school because it already is at school. When a present-day Czech school considers itself neutral in the matter or religion and worldview, the religion is therefore present in its broadest sense.²⁰

²⁰ Muroňová, E. (2012). *Spirituální dimenze kultury školy na základní škole na příkladu ČR. Příspěvek k diskusi z nábožensko-pedagogického pohledu.* (Work.) Brno: FE MU.

The topic of religion – what do we mean by the term religion? Is it knowledge of pupils about particular religious and philosophical schools? Or is it more about realization and learning about views, attitudes and faith of individuals who are subjects of the education process? It is not only about pupils but also about teachers, it is about plurality of world-views.

School and religion

So, what should a school teach if the state as a source of financing decides that a pupil should learn something about religious studies? That all religions have something good in them? That it does not matter what one believes in? That they are good for people to help them tolerate each other?

Framework and goal of the research

The research was aimed at the area of values, culture and religion in the school environment. The problem was explored through qualitative research strategy. The respondent group consisted of teachers and students who are familiar with the topic of values and spirituality in the school environment. Thus, the group of respondents is selected purposefully and a grounded theory a qualitative research method was chosen. Data gathering was done by focus group discussions (four focus groups) which were transcribed and analyzed by open coding. At the beginning of the analysis it was necessary to establish individual terms that emerged from the discussion. Also, a certain reflection has been made about those terms, how are they viewed and what is “behind them.” The goal of the survey was to acquire statements from teachers and students about the situation in the school environment regarding the topic of values and spirituality as a part of the culture of recognition in the school environment.

Research questions

Does school environment provide space for spiritual dimension? Is it important to strengthen the spiritual dimension at school, an if so, then how? Should a school be a place, that is neutral to the topics of religion?

Analysis of the research survey-open coding

Three main conceptions of the main topic emerged during the discussions and lectures. Those were used as a disambiguation for the coding. It is an approach to the topic from the point of view of AN INDIVIDUAL, SOCIETY and SCHOOL. It is necessary to realize that all three views are very closely linked and interconnected. Nonetheless it seemed very useful to separate them for coding because of the definition of the term and specific information. Opinions about and attitudes towards religion were the main topic of the lectures and discussions.

Only the main categories and related quotations appear in open coding. This is due to time limitations. Analysis and description based on the attributes will be the topic for the next paper on this subject.

CONCEPTION OF AN INDIVIDUAL AND RELIGION
CATEGORY no. 1: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT (INDIVIDUAL)

Category no. 1: Identity development	
Property	Dimension
SPIRITUAL ASPECT	PREDOMINANT
RESPECT	GREAT
FREEDOM	HIGH
INTIMACY (PRIVACY)	GREAT
HARM	OFTEN

Spiritual aspect

The spiritual aspect attribute appeared in this category with dimensional range predominant. The respondents state that it is important to deal with a lot of things that are connected to the existence of a human being, to ask questions about the meaning of life and searching and that this is not possible without a confrontation with religion.

“I consider religion to be an ordinary part of life, not as a matter of conviction of faith but more as something related to values and many things that concern us whether we want it or not.” (Jed/X6/1)

“It is a question and people must deal with a question: ‘Who am I?’” (Jed/1PR/1)

“But an enlightened and reasonable man first must somehow confront himself with religion for his own sake.” (Jed/1PR/2)

Respect

The attribute respect appears here. Respondents are emphasizing how important it is that school perceives a person considering his differences and enables him to openly declare himself for what he considers important.

“If a person is perceived considering his difference and is respected and honored, then he will also do so towards others. This way a school will gain accent and strength. Therefore, a school gains the ability to become a good and humane school.” (Jed/2PR/1)

Freedom

This attribute accents the meaning of freedom in a sense of either associating or dissociating with a religion. The respondents stated that in our environment it is more stigmatizing to associate yourself with a religion than to be irreligious. Religion is not viewed as a private thing but the right to declare yourself for your faith without a fear of mockery is emphasized.

“Where it can never be commanded, and he can never be obstructed by state, therefore religious freedom must be guaranteed by state.” (Jed/1PR/3)

“And it is also necessary that one has a right to disassociate himself from a religion. But religion is not only a private thing, meaning that religion can also appear publicly, and that the religious freedom is guaranteed as a man’s right to publicly profess religion and that religion can also influence worldviews, individuals and the whole society and politics.” (Jed/1PR/4)

Intimacy and harm

The respondents emphasized the private aspect of religion in the sense that it is something deeply personal. They presented their experiences from school environment where teachers decide not to open the topic of religion so that the religious pupils are not exposed to discrimination from their classmates. The analysis pointed out the problem of religious values that the schools can’t handle.

“Of course, religion is also a private thing in the sense that it is something deeply personal.” (Jed/1PR/5)

“Sometimes teachers try to avoid the topic of religious diversity in fear of young people being discriminated.” (Jed/1PR/6)

“And it concerns also the religious values with which the schools have the biggest problems. This is very harmful for the people that are religiously oriented.” (Jed/2PR/2)

CATEGORY no. 2: MANAGING DIVERSITY (INDIVIDUAL)

Category no. 2: Managing diversity (Individual)	
Property	Dimension
ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCES	IMPORTANT
RESPECT	SIGNIFICANT
PREJUDICE BEHAVIOR	OFTEN
CRITERIA FOR DIFFERENTIATION	LOW

Acceptance of differences and respect

Encountering differences requires time and space. Opinion of another person deserves regard and respect. The respondents also emphasized respect to oneself and dignity which every person deserves, because the intolerance of the outside world can damage a self-concept of an adolescent. Critical engagement strengthens the ability to consider one's system of sense.

“This encounter with diversity and differences requires time and patience and cannot bear abbreviated idealization or a change or perspective.” (Jed/1PR/7)

“But the differences cannot be eliminated, it is not good for them to be eliminated but on the contrary it is necessary to face them. They are in fact a sign of uniqueness of each person.” (Jed/1PR/8)

“For one to contemplate about meaning of his own life one must recognize the opinion of another person, so that's why this initiative.” (Jed/Much/1)

“Critical engagement strengthens the ability to deeply consider one's system of sense and also makes possible existential indestructibility which it provides.” (Jed/1PR/9)

“By intercultural and interreligious meetings, I am also challenged to do something, to define myself in a new way, to find respect in myself, to better know myself, to better respect myself as a person who has its own dignity and is different and distinct from others.” (Jed/1PR/10)

Prejudiced behavior

Some researches show the presence of prejudices in adolescents towards religion. High level of intolerance towards believers even classmates who are believers. The respondents are highlighting the importance of religion which can help even a non-believer to answer questions about his own existence.

“Even the journalists who started the survey were stunned by the prejudiced behavior of high schoolers towards religion in the Czech Republic.” (Jed/Much/2)

“I think that the problem has deeper roots, I think that young people have 'poured out the baby together with the water', I think that religion has a tremendous positive potential which can truly help a non-believer to consider the meaning of his life.” (Jed/Much/3)

“I did a content analysis on that topic and from that analysis I figured out that the students were almost repeating a lecture from Marxism-Leninism.” (Jed/Much/4)

Criteria for differentiation

The respondents are talking about missing criteria for differentiation, because many young people are taking stances without knowing the facts and reality. Quick judgement without the knowledge of the subject, insight into religion should not be only superficial knowledge of facts.

“If we transfer this to the spiritual or psychosocial area, then we don’t know criteria for differentiation.” (Jed/Man/1)

“Before he makes an assumption, so the insight into religion should not be only superficial knowledge of facts.” (Jed/1PR/11)

“I am finding out that not even the university students possess criteria for differentiation.”(Jed/Man/2)

CONCEPTION OF SOCIETY AND RELIGION
CATEGORY no. 3: RELIGION IN SOCIETY

Category no. 3: Religion in Society	
Property	Dimension
DIVERSITY	HIGH
TRADITION	IMPORTANT
RESPECT AND RECOGNITION	DECISIVE
PLURALISM	HIGH
CONFLICT	POSSIBLE
FUNDAMENTALISM	SIGNIFICANT
CERTITUDE	LOW

Diversity

The respondents are talking about the fact that diversity is normal and differences are a basis for a discussion and thinking.

“Differences are a basis for thinking, because what is the same, what is normal does not create any questions. ” (Spo/1PR/12)

“Diversity is definitely not some disruptive aspect of the current normality and conventions but it is more like that being different, being not alike is normal.” (Spo/1PR/13)

“Humane quality of a society and even a humane quality of a school is reflected in how the school can handle diversity.” (Spo/1PR/14)

“Today we are together writing a history of Europe and for the first time in history we can see diversity as a strength of Europe.” (Spo/1PR/18)

Tradition

In this context the attribute of tradition shows how throughout the history people had to handle diversity, how it was hard to live without fear of one's divergence of any kind. Traditions are also a term that is shielding diversity and connection of all cultures of Europe.

"Discrimination and banishment of those who were different goes throughout European history as a red thread." (Spo/1PR/15)

"European history documents how hard it always was for people in Europe to live without fear of being different." (Spo/1PR/16)

"It is a paradox, shared history and culture which connect Europe serve also as basis for European diversity." (Spo/1PR/17)

Respect and recognition

In the legal and political area with the European Union the fight against social exclusion and respect for all religious groups is highlighted. The upholding of human rights, democracy, freedom and human dignity is also emphasized.

"Legal and political rules are also criteria of quality of European democracy." (Spo/1PR/19)

"Article 2 states: the Union is based on values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, legal state and the upholding of human rights including the rights of minorities." (Spo/1PR/20)

"And in article three there is this sentence: Fights against social exclusion and discrimination, respects your rich cultural and linguistic diversity, sees to preserve and grow the cultural heritage." (Spo/1PR/21)

"But even the legal recognition enables a face-to-face dialog on a same level." (Spo/1PR/22)

"Is understanding, tolerance and respect towards all religious groups." (Spo/1PR/23)

"Mostly the importance of religion is highlighted and its respect for religion in society." (Spo/1PR/24)

Pluralism

"Pluralism is considered a value and diversity is considered an enrichment. EU is characterized by a feeling of togetherness, shared culture by which it is connected." (Spo/1PR/25)

"Togetherness should be a certain connection, it should enable individual countries to participate." (Spo/1PR/26)

Conflict

Religious diversity served often as a reason for persecution, wars and conflicts. Therefore, it is important to know how to handle conflicts, conflicts relate to

plurality. No church or religion can claim right for the state power and for enforcing its own claim on truth.

“It was religious diversity which was always reason for banishments, pogroms, wars, for people to be eliminated.” (Spo/1PR/27)

“Conflicts relate to plurality.” (Spo/1PR/28)

“Seen from a social point of view, it is not primarily about avoiding conflicts but about being able to handle them.” (Spo/1PR/29)

“In religious sense, in religious area, it is a European principle to establish this by separating church from state, so that no church or religion can claim right for the state power and for enforcing its own claim on truth.” (Spo/1PR/30)

Fundamentalism

Everyone who thinks about Europe must deal with the problem of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism emerges everywhere where people feel insecure and endangered. All who think differently are demonized.

“Everyone who thinks about Europe must deal with the problem of fundamentalism. It is not only a European or Islamic problem. And it could be one’s great error to confuse religion and fundamentalism.” (Spo/1PR/31)

“Tomáš Halík from Prague university points out the trend of fundamentalism, he says that fundamentalism emerges everywhere where there is a period of uncertainty and significant changes.” (Spo/1PR/32)

“Aside from people who think differently also people labeled heretics or liberals are demonized.” (Spo/1PR/33)

“When people feel like they are losing their certainty (certitude) and security (securitas), while the word securitas might be used in many different connotations, then it might lead to this dangerous development.” (Spo/1PR/34)

Certitude

Relationships, meaning and faith are connected to certitude, in our conditions we are emphasizing religion as an ideology rather than as a personal spiritual culture.

“Aren’t all existential and crucial aspects of life like relationships, meaning and faith somehow connected to certainty, not securitas?” (Spo/1PR/35)

“... the tragedy of Czech tradition is that we still emphasize religion more as an ideology and less as a worldview and least as a personal spiritual culture.” (Spo/Much/5)

CONCEPTION OF SCHOOL AND RELIGION
CATEGORY no. 4: RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AT SCHOOL

Category no. 4: Religious plurality at school	
Property	Dimension
RESPECT AND ACKNOWLEDGE OF DIFFERENCES	NECESSARY
BENEFIT	SIGNIFICANT
INTEGRATION	IMPORTANT
INCORPORATION INTO CLASSES	NECESSARY
UNDERSTANDING	IMPORTANT
RISK OF REJECTING DIVERSITY	HIGH
THREATS	POSSIBLE
RIGHT FOR A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	LOW
DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE	IMPORTANT

Respect and acknowledge of differences

A child must be respected at school and teachers must not forget child's own uniqueness and they must be aware that this is valuable, the differences.

"Without a need to doubt oneself or to feel insecure." (Škl/1PR/36)

"A child must feel respected at school and feel a certain level of acknowledgment, only then if school respects what is important for the child." (Škl/1PR/37)

"School that hurts, hurts also human dignity." (Škl/2PR/3)

"But teachers must not forget their own uniqueness and they must be aware that this is what makes them valuable." (Škl/2PR/4)

"So, to achieve that we treat each other with respect, dignity and that we can appreciate each other." (Škl/1HO/1)

Benefit and integration

The analysis opened a discussion about the possibilities of integration religion into school environment. The question presents itself whether it belongs there and whether it is or should be present. How should school respect religious ceremonies

that take place in families. Even if we reject religion ourselves we should be able to respect religious views about life.

“Religion also considers people who are somehow weak or disadvantaged.” (Škl/1PR/38)

“We can get a touch for a possibility of religiousness of another person only when we learn ourselves to consider the fact that even if we reject religion, we respect validity of religious views about life.” (Škl/1PR/39)

“Because people who participate in school are those who ask themselves questions, questions about religion and their own purpose.” (Škl/1PR/40)

“The teaching of confessional religion has twelve different forms.” (Škl/1PR/41)

“All kinds of religious events or ceremonies are present in family or society in which children live, so the question is, how to respect this at school.” (Škl/1PR/42)

“And there are also many events at school, formation of school’s daily life, school culture, ceremonies and celebrations, where religion can exhibit.” (Škl/1PR/43)

“So, the key question is not whether or not religion is or should be present at school.” (Škl/1PR/44)

Incorporation into classes

Teachers lack materials, textbooks, models on how to deal with the topic of religion, how to use it as a benefit in the learning process. Schools don’t know how to approach the topic, how to work with the multicultural aspect.

“How can I convince pupils, fellow teachers and parents to respect the diversity of religious coexistence, when it is not included in any textbook, how can I connect it to the multicultural aspect?” (Škl/X6/2)

“At the 1st stage I did not encounter any material that would be acceptable for the children.” (Škl/X6/3)

“We should not despair; framework educational programs mention terms ethnicity and minority religions at two points as a part of multicultural education.” (Škl/Much/6)

“I think that the problem of many schools is that they don’t know how to approach it. How to do it, when they don’t have any model, any example.” (Škl/Much/7)

“I prefer the idea which I would call hospitality, that means that one religious group would invite another to take part as a guest in their celebrations.” (Škl/1PR/45)

Understanding

School is obliged to give space to the diversity of religion and world-views.

“But for school to help find identity of its members and for the sake of mutual understanding, it would appropriate, and school is basically obliged to do that, to give space to the diversity of religion and world-views.” (Škl/1PR/46)

“The problem of diversity in society and at school is being reduced to the question of pariah and parvenu, the one who is insignificant and stands aside and the one who is honored. That is how Hannah Arendt formulated the idea.” (Škl/1PR/47)

Risk of rejecting diversity

A school which rejects diversity basically creates space for fundamentalism. School must handle the area of education, so why it should not handle diversity and differences.

“Doesn’t a school which does not deal with it create a space for fundamentalism?” (Škl/1PR/48)

“How can we handle education so that we can also handle diversity and differences?” (Škl/1PR/49)

“Of course, the idea behind this project is to create a worthy school, a school which is worthy of life.” (Škl/1PR/50)

Threats

A trademark of a good school is that all pupils feel good there and can express their uniqueness, without being humiliated by others. A trademark of a good school is how it can handle religious plurality. Many people keep their religion private or want to keep it private because they assume that this diversity threatens serenity and peace of school. Sometimes believers are viewed as strange and on the other hand children believers might feel threatened at school.

“In a culture and development of school. A quality of a good school can be known by how it can handle religious plurality.” (Škl/1PR/51)

“And others view integration of religious diversity at school as something that disrupts school’s serenity and peace.” (Škl/1PR/52)

“And difference is considered something that disrupts school’s normality.” (Škl/1PR/53)

“Many people view the principles of enlightenment such as freedom, equality, solidarity, endangered by religion. So they want religion to be kept private.” (Škl/1PR/54)

“This leads to an idea of school as something that should be free of any religion, free of any religious views.” (Škl/1PR/55)

“Here we can see children believers who are an oppressed minority and from my experience as a parent I know of an example of a teacher, believer, who was secretly manipulative towards the children. When my daughter came to inform me that the teacher is weird, I suddenly found myself on the other side.” (Škl/Mur/1)

“You are believers, you are weird.” (Škl/Gu/1)

Right for a religious education

Religious education as a transmission of faith is every person’s right. Religious diversity is a job for the whole school and school should encourage respect for it. Religion should be considered as a part of intercultural education. When children are learning about other cultures a part of it is religion.

“Religious education as a transmission of faith is every person’s right and it is a right of parents, but every education according to the universal charter of human rights article 26.” (Škl/1PR/56)

“At the same time religious education is considered a part of intercultural learning and political education.” (Škl/1PR/57)

“Religious diversity is a job for the whole school and school should be managed in a way that encourages respect for it.” (Škl/1PR/58)

“It is also needed to ask about school’s curriculum, how does it take into account intercultural education regarding religion.” (Škl/1PR/59)

Development of social perspective

“I think that the content of what is taught at school is most important, because the amount of accumulating information remains.” (Škl/Man/3)

“The VISA surveys – particularly in Germany – show that pupils can’t work with this information.” (Škl/Man/4)

“... to develop what is called social perspective in other words the ability to consider the consequences of one’s actions for others.” (Škl/Sme/1)

CATEGORY no. 5: SCHOOL AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

Category no. 5: School as a social system	
Property	Dimension
COOPERATION	HIGH
DEFINING GOALS	DECISIVE
PARTICIPATION	HIGH
COMMUNICATION	DECISIVE
OPEN CONFLICT	NECESSARY
CHANGE OF ATTITUDE	SIGNIFICANT
EVALUATION	NECESSARY

Cooperation

If we care about the continuous development of a school, school’s environment must participate and be engaged. Important agents of this process are pupils, they

cannot feel like they are not important. Research surveys should show what do teachers expect from pupils and work with it in accordance with the results.

“Of course, a lot could be added to these words, but it is very important to realize who are those who are participating.” (Škl/2PR/5)

“If we aim for a long-term school development we must also include other people, not only teachers, but also pupils, parents and school’s environment.” (Škl/2PR/6)

“I think that I have a good experience in this matter, that even from a position of a parent in a parents’ association you can change some things if you gain support from other people.” (Škl/Gu/2)

“I think it is a great shame that the pupils are viewed as a non-important element in education.” (Škl/Voj/1)

“We had a similar survey on how teachers view the pupils and what do they want from them and we were terrified – they should be clean and have the equipment.” (Škl/Much/8)

Defining goals and participation

Development of a school is the effort of those involved. It is important to realize what we want, where we are and how do we want to contribute to this development. The visions are important: it is important how we envision our school, what the goal is, and we must be able to define and set the goals.

“So it is very important to realize what we want, where we are, where we stand. But also, to ask what we want, what is our vision and our idea.” (Škl/2PR/7)

“If we have a specific idea at a specific school, our visions, how we envision our school as a better school, we can better set our goals, because they are oriented in some direction.” (Škl/2PR/8)

“It is also needed that the attitude of teachers should be different than before, they should participate in school activities and feel that their participation is significant.” (Škl/2PR/9)

“School development as an effort of those involved.” (Škl/2PR/10)

Communication

All parties of school should be invited for a discussion. It is important to know how to communicate, discuss, listen to other opinions, ideas of everyone may differ. Communication of school is the alpha and omega. There must be a space for communication.

“This is a question that needs to be discussed, debated, communicated, it is necessary to hear other opinions because the ideas of individuals at school can vary significantly.” (Škl/2PR/11)

“That’s why communication is the alpha and omega of every school development.” (Škl/2PR/12)

“But the hard question remains, how to make good communication happen, how I can communicate well.” (Škl/2PR/13)

“So it must be completely different than the staff meetings before: the principal presented the instructions from above and teacher were only looking at the time and waited till it was over.” (Škl/2PR/14)

“If teachers want to communicate with each other about their visions of the school, what their goals are, there needs to be more space and time for this kind of communication.” (Škl/2PR/15)

Open conflict

It is important to ask whether we want to hide these conflicts or to deal with them. Schools are used to conceal or ignore the differences in values. These discussions cannot be constructive if the teachers do not educate themselves and do not think about changes and problems.

“It is always important to ask: Do we want to put those conflicts aside, to conceal them or do we want to take them seriously?” (Škl/1PR/60)

“Schools are used to conceal or ignore the differences in values which could appear there, or they solve it through personalization, they connect it to an individual.” (Škl/2PR/16)

“And they should exhibit a level of great sensitivity and perception, they must know how to hear the needs of people involved in the conflict.” (Škl/1PR/61)

Change of attitude

“But for teachers this also means a change of the way they think, how they view the school.” (Škl/2PR/17)

“Because those teachers must change their attitude, they can’t imagine that this is just me, my field, my subject and my classroom, but they must change their view of me – my school, our school.” (Škl/2PR/18)

“So, the development of school is not only the development of teaching because teaching also expects a personal development of teachers which means they need to be prepared and willing to create new concepts of teaching and accept these changes.” (Škl/2PR/19)

Evaluation

Evaluation is currently a new ritual which helps to assess situations and find solutions. Schools should be capable of evaluation and be able to take a moment and think about next objectives.

“Sometimes it is important to take a moment and ask, what this is for, what it means, what the main objective is.” (Škl/2PR/20)

“And it is important to think about what we are doing right now, whether is is good for our goal, for the goals of our school. And this is called evaluation. It is currently a new ritual around here.” (Škl/2PR/21)

“But it is very good for motivation because those who participate at school have much bigger motivation when they see that their observations, opinions, ideas about improvements, the motivation are much stronger than if somebody just decided for them.” (Škl/2PR/22)

Final questions

Even if present-day Czech school considers itself neutral in the matter of religion and worldview, the religion is therefore present in its broadest sense. A school is set in a specific environment and has a specific history; therefore, religion is present. A school is made by people with ideals such as love, hope, faith and justice. Also by a fact that these people must deal with significant events in their lives like birth, fear, death, success, etc. Religion is present in all kinds of subjects, in human communication, in rituals, holidays and in religious education.

To account for a religious dimension in school culture means to take completeness of education seriously. When school ignores this religious dimension or pushes it into private area of life it damages the completeness of human education. Religious dimension at school means to take seriously cultural diversity, which is through pupils and teachers present more and more. It also means that the school is not deprived of impulses which are meaningful for everybody.

Religious is presented in the completeness of a human personality, in values, in a search for the meaning of life. It is connected to values such as human dignity, acknowledgment, tolerance, respect or dialog. Religious dimension is linked to multicultural reality, to recognition of differences and rejection of discriminatory behavior.

Respect for the presence of religious dimension in school culture encourages a school which is open to plurality and considerate. It is a school which respects the individual and grants him basic dignity regardless of his or her achievements. It searches new forms of engagement regarding various cultural and religious traditions. It serves as a space for ideals and it is ready to step out of its own shadow.

This survey opened a plethora of questions which every teacher should ask himself regardless of his own convictions, faith or attitude etc. A group of teachers connected to the initiative “Man, school and values” which is a partner organization to the Austrian initiative „LEBENSWERTESCHULE“ (www.lebenswerteschule.at) asked a series of questions. These might serve as an inspiration for more reflections about religion in school environment or spiritual dimensions and values.

Martin Jäggle, Faculty of Catholic Theology, Vienna

- How is “religion” present in our school’s culture? Are these phenomena viewed as an asset or a complication?

- How does a teacher view the value of students? How do pupils view the value of a teacher?
- What answer does the current educational provide if a pupil asks an existential question? Who is qualified to answer it?

Ludmila Muchová, Faculty of Theology, University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice

- What is a dialog to current educational processes at Czech school?
- Do Czech teachers ask questions about reasons for the effort for human equality regarding law and dignity?
- How is secular humanism of the Czech educational system open to a dialog with other world-views and is it legitimate that school is a place for such a dialog?

Lenka Gulová, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno

- Some children and teachers do not feel good at school, where is the problem?
- Do we ask children about their values and can we talk about our values?
- What is really important for a person's life? What is not discussed at school?

Eva Muroňová, Franz Kett's Society for Pedagogy, Ostrava

- Is a development of personal spiritual dimension part of pupil's personal development? What are the responsibilities of school and parents here?
- Should existential questions about life fulfillment be a part of school's educational space?
- If religious dimension of life is a part of culture, how can school open itself to this dimension without creating an opportunity for indoctrination?

Tomáš Havel, Vocational School of Education, Svatý Jan pod Skalou

- What does a non-discriminating approach to religious and cultural differences look like?
- What do teachers and pupils need to be "different" without fear?
- How can school become a place where a person's dignity is more important than his performance?

František Trapl, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno

- Should school teach about morals and moral questions?
- How much can teacher reveal about his own principles and values during classes?
- Can school be neutral in a matter of values?