

Article

“Religious Education for All 2.0”: The Hamburg Approach of Shared Religious Education

Jochen Bauer 

Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung Hamburg, 20357 Hamburg, Germany;
jochen.bauer@li.hamburg.de

Abstract: Hamburg’s “Religious Education for All” (*RUfa 2.0*) is a confessional multifaith approach to shared religious education and a new and unique concept in Germany and Europe. All large religious communities in Hamburg collaborate their legal responsibility for its content. *RUfa 2.0* is neither grounded in neutral religious studies nor in pluralistic theology of religion but relies on differentiated learning arrangements. They enable students to learn about their own religion, to learn about other religions and to develop their religious identity through dialogue. This article outlines development, legal and organizational frameworks, goals and competences, didactical principles, teacher roles and teacher training and places them in a European perspective.

Keywords: religious education for all; shared religious education; Hamburg; interreligious learning; dialogical learning; dialogue

1. Introduction

“Imagine if we could shape a future in which the diversity of religions does not divide us, but unites us. Here in Hamburg, religious education for all offers us precisely this opportunity”. With these words, Amal Jakobi, one of the first Muslim religious education teachers, summarized the Hamburg approach in front of a national audience at the German Unity Day Service in 2023 (Jakobi 2023). She continued: “Our children learn about a wide variety of faiths and are taught by teachers who also come from different religious communities. My colleagues are Christians, Jews, Alevi or Muslims, just like me. In a world that is also characterized by conflict, we strive to listen to each other, understand each other and learn from each other. Together we discover the beauty and richness of different religious traditions. What fills my heart with love? How do I want to help shape this world? And what do I hope for in life? What is sacred to me? I am convinced that if we seriously engage with others, we will find ourselves and promote a culture of acceptance and respect. Together with our students, we are building a society in which everyone can live their identity and beliefs freely—without fear of prejudice or discrimination”.

Within the last two decades, the German city state of Hamburg with its almost 2 million inhabitants and 250,000 school students developed a unique approach for religious education in its 400 largely state-run schools. “Religious Education for All” is characterized by a culture of sharing. It is controlled and entertained by the state, but the religious communities define its content. It is denominational but also reflects religious diversity. It is taught by theologically trained teachers but of different religions. It enables students to learn and intensify their faith but also provides understanding of a variety of religions. How did this approach to religious education emerge and what challenges lie ahead? Which students participate and who is teaching? What does the syllabus look like and which skills are promoted? A closer look at the Hamburg approach in comparison to other systems and approaches in Europe reveals the opportunities and challenges for a system of shared religious education on a statewide level.



Citation: Bauer, Jochen. 2024.

“Religious Education for All 2.0”: The Hamburg Approach of Shared Religious Education. *Religions* 15: 916. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080916>

Academic Editors: James Nelson, Janet Orchard and Karlo Meyer

Received: 15 June 2024

Revised: 11 July 2024

Accepted: 26 July 2024

Published: 29 July 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

2. Religious Education in Germany

In Germany all school-related matters are regulated not at a federal level but by the 16 *Länder* (states), thus promoting a great variety of regional variations. At first sight, the Hamburg situation looks more unique than its legal framework provides. As the only school subject regulated nationwide in the constitution, “religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools [...] Without prejudice to the state’s right of supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious communit[ies]”. (Art. 7, 3 German Basic Law) (Federal Ministry of Justice 2022; mistranslation corrected, JB) It also guarantees that students may opt out and teachers cannot be obligated (Art. 7, 2 and 7, 3b).

As the nationwide standard model, most schools in other *Länder* of Germany provide separate Protestant and Catholic religious education from primary school to secondary school, including A-level testing. For this, classes are divided up. The classes are given by state-employed teachers, sometimes even by pastors delegated from the two churches. Teachers are trained in Protestant or Catholic theology at state-run universities and, after their MEd, complete their formation by an 18-month-long in-service teacher training. As usual in Germany, teachers have a second subject. Although the final teacher test is given by the state, all religious teachers need additionally a teaching permit from their respective church.

Recent decades have shown an increasing challenge to this standard model. The ongoing secularization of society led to the establishment of an alternative subject (ethics or philosophy) for those students who do not want to participate in religious education. Due to migration, more and more religious communities claimed their own religious education in state schools: Muslims, Jews, Alevis, Orthodox Christians, free churches, Ahmadiyya et al. Meanwhile, the *Land* of Hesse provides twelve different religious education programs!

The standard model is increasingly hard to organize—and expensive. Students and their parents question more and more the separation of classes along denominational lines which they find no longer of great importance for their lives. Heads of school bypass official regulations by implementing practical solutions without separation. Increasingly, reality lacks a legal framework. Nationwide, therefore, school administration, politics, religious communities and research look for alternatives. One line is to establish confessional cooperation between protestant and catholic religious education, even trying to form a common “Christian education”. The most daring approach, however, is Hamburg’s “Religious Education for All”.

3. Sharing Development: The Special Path in Hamburg

At the beginning of the special development in Hamburg lies a peculiar historic situation. In 1945, the overwhelming majority of the city’s population were Lutherans. The small Catholic diaspora favored concentrating on their few denominational schools. In the city, lying in shambles after the Allied bombardments, nobody was interested in stirring up denominational unease by establishing a complicated system for religious education. Thus, only protestant religious education was offered in state schools—and more or less all students participated. This continued well into the 1980s when the effects of secularization and migration could no longer be overlooked. Finally, in the early 1990s the university-based experiences of interreligious dialogue spilled over into the pedagogical realm and were combined with the emerging discussion on intercultural learning. “Dialogical learning” became the buzz word of the time and of this first phase of “Religious Education for All”, meanwhile nicknamed as “RUfa” (*ReligionsUnterricht für alle*). In contrast to neutral approaches in religious studies dialogical learning emphasizes subjective understanding and communication. The concept focused on the students exchanging and discussing their own religious experiences, worldviews and knowledge. Later, references to pluralistic religious theology were taken into consideration. Teachers and the teacher training institutes ventured into the didactical and practical questions of interreligious learning, later supported by empirical research at the *Universität Hamburg* (as e.g., in the European

wide, comparative research within the REDco-Projekt; Jozsa et al. 2009). First steps were undertaken in modelling a proper syllabus and developing schoolbook-like materials.

In hindsight, called “*RUfa 1.0*”, this phase was essentially determined by the Protestant church, as is obvious in the official label of the approach: “religious education for all *with Protestant responsibility*”. Although members of other religions selected by the church were included in the conceptual considerations as part of a “Discussion Group for Interreligious Religious Education” (GIR), major religious communities kept their distance from this project and its development (Catholic Archdiocese, the Muslim organizations of DITIB and VIKZ, Orthodox churches, Jewish community). Moreover, many GIR members were converts and thus not always reflecting the migration background of many religions. Protestant content and approaches predominated in teaching, mainly because it was only possible to become a teacher in Hamburg with a Protestant theology degree and as a member of a Protestant church. However, the reason for the dominance of Protestantism was not a desire for power or missionary zeal but rooted in the legal and institutional framework. The sharing of responsibility between state and religious communities, as regulated in the German constitution, requires an institution which represents a religious community. The German High Courts requested high standards for this institution such as sufficient size of membership, long-term stability, the solely religious nature of the organization, political independence from foreign countries (like Turkey) and commitment to the democratic principles which shape German schools. Such an institution was lacking, in particular, on the Islamic side, which is by far the greatest migrant religion. This changed in 2012.

On November 13 of that year, the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the representatives of the major three Islamic religious organizations (Schura-Hamburg, DITIB-Hamburg and VIKZ) signed a “state contract”, a fundamental agreement on all issues concerning religion in public life and for cooperation between state and religion in various fields. Although Hamburg had concluded similar contracts with the two major churches and the Jewish community a few years previously, it was the first time ever in Germany that a state contract was agreed with Muslim communities—a widely acclaimed and major step for their acceptance and integration in Germany. This was preceded by an extensive legal and religious studies review process. At the same time, a largely identical state contract was signed with the Alevi community, whose status had already been recognized in other *Länder*. This opened up the possibility for these religious communities to be responsible for religious education within the provisions of the German Basic Law. However, instead of striving for separate religious instruction (as usual in all the other German *Länder*), the contracting parties in Hamburg “agreed to recognize the importance, value and opportunities of religious instruction in mixed-denominational [...] groups at state schools in the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg” and “therefore strived for further development within the framework [...] of the Basic Law” ([Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg 2012](#)). An identical agreement was concluded with the Protestant church at the same time, followed by the Jewish community in 2014.

The agreed development was far-reaching and encompassed all aspects of religious education: school practice, didactics, curricula, teacher training and (religious) teacher permits as well as the institutional framework. In the beginning, a didactic concept was drafted. Based on this, exemplary teaching units were developed and discussed, pilot projects were carried out, examined empirically ([Wolff 2018](#)) and evaluated and finally a new syllabus was drawn up. Teacher training, both at university and for the practical teacher training at the *Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung*, was put on a broader footing in order to qualify the first Islamic, Alevi and Jewish teachers. Finally, a juridical expertise proved the legal possibility of the new approach.

After six years, the religious communities and the Hamburg Ministry of Education (Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung (BSB)) agreed in 2019 to introduce “Religious Education for All *with shared responsibility*” (*RUfa 2.0*) throughout Hamburg. The Archdiocese of Hamburg joined early in 2022, thus involving all major religious communities. In the

summer of 2023, the new syllabus for *RUfa 2.0* was introduced (BSB 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e). All stakeholders are aware that implementation will require a longer period of time and that the syllabus, particularly in terms of the breadth of religious diversity, can only be fully implemented in school practice gradually. In this respect, the new syllabus is both a standard and a development task.

RUfa 2.0 has been discussed extensively in academic religious didactics and theology (Bauer 2019, 2022a, 2022b; Härle 2019; Kemnitzer and Roser 2021; Knauth and Weiße 2020; Kuhlmann 2020) and in the juridical discourse (Bauer 2014a; Wißmann 2019).

3.1. *Sharing Responsibility: The Legal and Institutional Framework*

The German legal tradition does not follow a French or American style laicism by separating state and church strictly but supports religious life without privileging a specific religion or forcing anyone to be religious. Religious education is just one, though important, aspect of the interaction between state and religious communities. Here, the German constitution requires a system of mixed responsibility (*res mixtae*) between state and each religious community. While the state secures the basic pedagogical principles in religious education (such as competence orientation, learner-centered teaching approaches, democratic education), it is up to the religious communities to define its content along with their religious tenets. This way, the state can stay religiously neutral while enabling the students to learn in and about their own religion and thus materialize religious freedom, one of the major human rights, as freedom *for* religion. To guarantee equally religious freedom as freedom *from* religion, religious education is not compulsory for all students and an opt-out-option is installed. In its landmark decision of 1987, the constitutional court pointed out that the religious communities have great freedom in defining the content and the instruction methods in religious education—as long as it keeps religious education. Although comparisons to other worldviews and humanities can be included, the core must be the religious instruction of the religious community (Wißmann 2019). By this, a combined program of religion and ethics, of religious and non-religious worldviews, is legally excluded.

The mixed responsibility is established at an institutional level through “joint commissions”. They have been set up by the Hamburg Ministry of Education (*Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung*) with each religious community that meets the legal requirements for (co-)responsibility for religious education. In their respective joint commission, each religious community declares that the syllabus and all other aspects of religious education are in line with their respective tenets, thus fulfilling the constitutional provisions. It must be decided separately and not by a majority of all participating religions because one religion cannot define the tenets of any other. However, it is the same religious education program which the various religions and their respective joint commission with the state decide upon. Therefore, they are coordinated by the “Commission for Religious Education for All” (*RUfa* commission) which prepares synchronous resolutions of the joint commissions where the final approval is given. In order to include the voice of other religions that do not (yet) meet the legal requirements on an institutional level, the religious communities set up a working group (*Fachteam*) without state involvement, with representatives of Buddhist, Hindu and Bahai groups in the city. Meanwhile a thread of discussion has also been established with Orthodox churches. While these commissions work on a more political level it is up to working groups of teachers from various religious backgrounds, equally determined by state and religious communities, to develop the details of syllabus and teaching material. All these groups meet on a regular basis, if necessary even monthly, and must find compromises to shape and define religious education for all. Although the state must stay religiously neutral, its active participation proved essential for this process, since as a neutral player the state can moderate without provoking fear of religious one-sidedness.

The shared responsibility in the development of religious education is one of the main reasons for a close network between the different religions in Hamburg. It proved stable even in times of conflict imported mostly from external affairs in Turkey or the

Israel–Palestine conflict when, for example, in the fall of 2023 common activities by the Muslim and Jewish leaders were organized.

3.2. *Sharing Learning: Competencies and Didactics*

“Religious education contributes to the freedom of faith [...] in a pluralistic society. Students deal with fundamental questions of life, encounter religious interpretations of world and life in their cultural context and can thus mature into sovereign subjects in religious questions” (BSB 2022a, p. 6f; 2022b, p. 44). With these words, the new syllabus characterizes the fundamental goals of *RUfa 2.0*. It is open to all students, regardless of whether they have a religious background or not. “Those who feel close to a specific religion can deepen their knowledge, get to know other beliefs and ways of life, reflect on their personal views and thus deepen their religious identity”. Those who grow up without strong ties to a religious tradition or are critical of religion can substantiate their critical and distanced attitude, reflect on it and better understand the religious attitudes of others (ibid.). Although it is not mandatory due to the constitutional regulation, almost all students participate from grades 1 to 6, while as of grade 7, when philosophy is offered as alternative subject, roughly half of the students choose *RUfa*.

In order to achieve these goals, the syllabus determines three intertwined key skills. (i) Dialogical competence as the ability to communicate respectfully and with changing perspectives about religious and ideological questions, experiences, convictions and ways of life, thereby taking into consideration religious traditions, and the ability to perceive and appreciate religious diversity. (ii) Judgement competence as the ability to reflect on questions against the background of religious traditions and convictions and to arrive at a well-founded judgment that is relevant to their own self-understanding and actions. (iii) Orientation competence as the ability of students to “perceive the questions relevant to their own lives and to orient themselves in and through religion”, subdivided into four key questions linked to the main content topics of *RUfa 2.0*: asking about religious traditions, asking about God/The Divine/Transcendence, asking about human beings and asking about responsibility. In the syllabus, the acquisition of competences is described formally, thus students can acquire and demonstrate the same competencies with reference to different religions. Competences and topics derive from key concepts and standards of religious education in all German *Länder* and thus ensure Germany-wide compatibility.

The teacher’s task of didactization implies determining what and how the students should learn and how to shape the learning arrangement to ensure successful and meaningful learning. For this a theoretical model is helpful which views religious education as a three-dimensional space (cf. for further elaboration of this model, see Bauer 2019). In *RUfa 2.0*, each dimension is dialectically regulated by two didactic principles called “orientations”.

The content dimension deals with the subject matter of religious education. For selecting and focusing the content of each learning unit, the developmental stage, the experiences, ideas and questions of the students must be considered (student orientation) as well as the narratives, artefacts, holy books, belief systems and other sources of religions (tradition or source orientation). Both must be related to each other and intertwined to secure meaningful learning. For the didactization of the content dimension, one must ask and answer questions like: What are the prevailing questions and experiences of children or teenagers out of which religious query can emerge? Where and how do children or teenagers experience feelings or questions which religious traditions pick up, enlighten or give answers? What are the concerns and ideas in religions which are of importance to the students in their particular situation and age? Apart from the subject matter, this dimension is not peculiar to religious education. It can be found in any other school subject, be it history or even mathematics.

The truth dimension, however, is specific to religious education since religions deal with truth. In the religious realm, truth claims refer to more than propositional convictions. They encompass a way of life, a behavior, they are “lived truth claims” (Dalferth 2004, p. 202). Therefore, religious education envisions authentic understanding (authenticity

orientation). *RUfa* strives to enable students to achieve an authentic understanding and expression of themselves (self-authenticity) and an authentic undistorted understanding of religions and their sources (object authenticity). For this, *RUfa* concentrates on the inside view of the respective religion rather than on a mere descriptive outside perspective upon religion (as for, example, in approaches linked to Ninian Smart) or on imposed religious concepts (as often happened in pluralistic concepts of the theology of religions). Differences and contradictions between religions should be addressed openly and not ignored in a harmonizing manner. However, authenticity alone, understood as the immediate unreflected expression of a religious person, a religious community or tradition alone, is dubious because it lacks critical reflection. A fundamentalist or extremist can be authentic—but dangerous. Therefore, theological reflection is of equal importance for *RUfa* (theological orientation). In *RUfa 2.0*, Christian topics are explored with regard to Protestant or Catholic theology, Islamic topics refer to Islamic theology, etc. As the students get older, theological discussions and texts themselves become the subject of learning. The theological orientation ensures reflection on authentic forms of faith. At first glance this may sound academic, but for the teacher it implies central questions for didactization like: Which authentic materials from the religions can facilitate an authentic undistorted understanding? How can one support students in expressing their own experiences, thoughts and convictions? Which theological concepts and arguments of the various religions help students to reflect critically on their faith and which can support a culture of dialogue and plurality? These questions may occur in any kind of denominational religious education. The *RUfa* approach, however, faces the peculiar challenge to determine to which religion it refers while considering authenticity and theology. Is it Christian, Islamic or Jewish theology? While dealing with various religions in the same class and lesson, *RUfa* is nevertheless not a program for patchworking or an overarching pluralistic theology of religions. It values and keeps the identity of the religions.

The identity dimension regulates the interaction of students and religions with each other. *RUfa* is characterized by an alternation of “dialogical phases” with “religion-specific phases” which concentrate on the perspective of one concrete religion. In general, all topics (like, e.g., God, central persons of religions, dying and death, creation, justice) are explored from multiple religious perspectives. In dialogical phases the students exchange their experiences and pre-understanding, present the results of learning tasks or discuss with each other. In religion-specific phases students discover religious stories or texts, acquire knowledge and reflect on their thinking on the subject matter. Dialogical and religion-specific phases alternate. This way, the students’ dialogue is related to specific religions and at the same time brings the religions themselves into the dialogue. This is also about identity formation. The religious backgrounds of the students play a decisive role in the selection of the concrete religious perspectives and in the design of the learning arrangements. In at least half of the religion-specific phases, they should deal with their own religion in order to gain a deeper understanding of it—in addition to a basic knowledge and understanding of the other religions in their class. For didactization, the teacher thus has to ask questions like: What are controversial topics for students to explore and discuss and which are relevant for the development of their religious identity? How to differentiate the lessons (e.g., groupwork, individual study programs, digital learning programs) in order to enable students to study their own religion intensively? How to bring together the variety of findings and stimulate dialogue to deepen understanding and self-reflection?

All three dimensions—content, truth and identity—interact in almost every lesson. This theoretical model enables the analysis and shaping of religious education in a *RUfa*-setting.

Sharing learning requires a complex didactic setting and differentiated learning arrangements with up-to-date teaching methods. For twenty years, Hamburg collected experiences and teaching material within the *RUfa 1.0* approach which are now revised and diversified for the new *RUfa 2.0* setting, provided in the new syllabus.

3.3. *Sharing Syllabus: Diversity of Perspectives*

The new syllabus for Religious Education for All defines the topics for each grade and details for each topic a “didactic circle” which concretizes the above-mentioned didactic model. It starts with exemplary experiences from the everyday life of each age group and with questions students typically come up with. These questions are then referred to religious sources (like stories, holy texts, etc.) which are listed for each religion in the syllabus reflecting the appropriate developmental stage of the children. These sources stimulate further reflection and provide possible answers. The didactic circle also works vice versa: the religious traditions and sources have their value in themselves and provide questions and new perspectives for the students. They can also give answers to questions which have not been raised yet. This didactic circle allows the teacher to adapt the compulsory topics to the age, the developmental stage, the learning modes and habits of the concrete learning group and students.

The traditions and sources are specified for various religions. On each cross-religious topic, the syllabus details eight perspectives: Christianity (partly differentiated between Protestantism and Catholicism), Islam, Judaism, Alevi, Buddhism, Hinduism and Bahai. These are supplemented by contextual perspectives such as philosophical, sociological, political or juridical perspectives and thus adding, e.g., atheistic or other worldviews as compulsory content. This great variety merely describes options. They should not be “rattled off” one after the other to avoid a meaningless “religion hopping”. Only those perspectives must be dealt with to which students in a class belong or with which they have a close relationship, thus providing the necessary knowledge for mutual understanding in the classroom. Three religious perspectives and the cultural context are always compulsory, guaranteeing a minimum knowledge of religious diversity even in more homogenous classes. Additionally, the syllabus mentions sources for individual in-depth studies in differentiated learning settings to ensure a deeper understanding in one’s own religion. *RUfa 2.0* is embedded in a learning and activity-oriented teaching culture that works in and with differentiated learning settings which is standard in many German schools.

In *RUfa 2.0* the students are not considered to bring from home enough religious knowledge and a religious identification to be an expert and representative of their religion. Acquiring knowledge and understanding of one’s religion is an important part of religious education. Only with this they can engage in dialogue and thus understand teachings, traditions and their fellow students—of their own and of other religions—more deeply. As a result, they develop a substantive individual understanding and an authentic view—sometimes even critical of their religion.

Within a multiperspective approach to all topics in religious education, sharing learning combines a deep understanding of one’s own religion with encountering the other religions and worldviews of the classmates. For this, each religion must formulate its tradition and sources with respect to contemporary experiences and questions and along cross-religious topics—but without abandoning its specific approaches and teachings. This might not be easy, but this way each religion becomes (more) compatible with—and more relevant to—the questions and topics of contemporary society, where they meet each other in a secular environment.

3.4. *Sharing Teaching: Roles and Tasks*

In Hamburg, religious education is generally taught exclusively by teachers with teacher training—not by clergy of any religion. In many cases, teachers are giving in the same class not only religion courses but a second subject and keep a class for two or more years. The topics with their variety of religious perspectives are taught by the same teacher—whatever religion she or he belongs to. A Muslim teacher, for example, must bring in Christian or Jewish or atheist positions in class. At the first glance this might surprise, but it allows the student to work on a topic jointly with a variety of perspectives without changing the teacher every day or hour—which could not be organized. It requires nevertheless the teacher to understand and portray other religions than her or his own and

shape authentic learning arrangements with materials from different religions for students of different religious affiliations. This is why authentic material is central for *RUfa 2.0*.

RUfa teachers should not be unattached museum guides through the world of religions. Teachers are role models for their students and should demonstrate with their personality the educational goals. A music teacher should show something of her or his love of music to the students. The same applies to religious education where position-taking plays an essential role (Lorenzen 2020; Riegel et al. 2024). *RUfa* aims to foster religious freedom in enabling students to live out their religion, to talk about it authentically and to mature by critical reflection. Students should learn to appreciate religious diversity and to respect one another in being different. Therefore, teachers in *RUfa* can neither be neutral moderators nor missionizing zealots. They have to demonstrate to their students an “exemplary positionality”—what it means to be influenced and guided by a religion in a way that is relevant to life—and at the same time to encounter other religions and ways of life in a dialogical manner (BSB 2022a). This can be done “subject authentically” only in one’s own religion (Bauer 2014b). A connection back to one’s own religion is therefore just as important as theological reflection and a dialogical attitude.

As a regular subject in school, religious education requires the same standards as other subjects. Thus, *RUfa* teachers have to know the cognitive, emotional and social development and skills of their class and its individual students to design the appropriate learning arrangement. They have to know the religious traditions in order to find the proper source and to prepare it adequately for student use. Teachers have to manage the classroom, instruct and moderate, accompany and support the students, evaluate and counsel them—and fulfill many more tasks daily. However, they are not alone. Within a school—or at least within teacher training classes—they work together in (multi)religious teams with other *RUfa* teachers and can (jointly) develop their religious education programs.

Sharing teaching is a challenging endeavor for students, parents and religious communities because they must trust in the professional skills and dialogical attitude of the *RUfa* teachers and for the teachers themselves because high knowledge, social competences and personal commitment are necessary. However, this is not unique to *RUfa* teachers as, e.g., teachers of politics or history face equivalent challenges.

3.5. Sharing Teacher Training: University and Professional Teacher Training

The training of teachers for *RUfa 2.0* requires theological teacher training in their own religion and an intensive encounter with other religions (Aguicenoglu et al. 2023). The University of Hamburg offers separate degree programs in Protestant, Catholic, Islamic and Alevi religions, although each student has also to participate in classes of other religions. After their MEd, in Germany all prospective teachers complete an 18-month-long in-service teacher training. In Hamburg this combines teaching in school with training classes and testing at the *Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung*. Here, they practice working in multireligious teacher groups. After completion, students must undergo formal authorization from their religious community to be able to teach *RUfa* in state schools.

Sharing teacher training is a prerequisite for *RUfa*. Without deep reflection of one’s own religion, without sufficient knowledge about other religions and without developing a dialogical attitude, students can hardly become professional teachers for a shared religious education. This way, teacher training retroacts on university programs which are still widely along denominational lines. They must adapt their study programs and interact with the theological departments of the other religions—and thus provide a theology more connected to a multireligious society.

3.6. Sharing Challenges and Outlook

Although based on a long tradition of interreligious and dialogical learning, *RUfa 2.0* has nevertheless only started. The new syllabus was introduced in summer 2023 and looks now at a three-year long implementation process. The 2000 teachers who give *RUfa* lessons in Hamburg need assistance to realize the high potential and demands of the *RUfa 2.0*

concept and syllabus. The teacher training institute of the city of Hamburg and the religious communities provide an intensive support program which focuses on three key areas.

Teachers need sufficient knowledge on religions which they have not studied during their university training and which they maybe not even have yet encountered in a more than superficial way. The *Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung* developed introductory films which play a key part in hybrid training classes, coached by teachers of the respective religions. Other training classes focus on a multiperspective approach to single topics.

Teachers require a great amount of authentic teaching materials because they are vital for multiperspective, activity-oriented teaching. For most religions except Christianity there are not enough teaching materials, or they do not match the topics of the new syllabus. This refers not only to content but also with regard to different reading abilities, multichannel learning and other standard requirements. Although some material can be taken from the denominational schoolbooks of the other German *Länder* and adapted to the *RUfa* approach, in many cases new material has to be developed. For this, there is some cooperation between the state-run *Landesinstitut* and the religious communities and their own training institutes.

Teachers, finally, have to develop their dialogical attitude. While in general this is mostly undisputed, questions arise in the concrete interaction with challenging students and parents and in the concrete options of teacher action in class. Although some advice is given in additional explanations to the syllabus, these questions need further discussion with colleagues and mentors in teacher training.

Sharing challenges and outlook do not question the advantages of the *RUfa* concept. It is the opposite: they provide a constant need for further cooperation.

4. The Hamburg Approach in a European Perspective

Europe demonstrates a great diversity in how each country (and as in the case of Germany, in how each region) state and religious communities relate to each other. This always has strong implications for religious education in school, both for the legal–political system and the didactical–practical approaches. In this field, the Hamburg *RUfa 2.0* features as a unique approach which becomes clear by comparing it with other well-known approaches.

From a legal–political perspective, the Hamburg approach lacks the conceptual clarity of the French *laïcité* which excludes religious education from public schools completely, allowing it only at private (mainly Catholic) schools. In the name of religious neutrality of the state the French system avoids the divisive question of religion in school. However, through this, it not only prevents students in the dominant state-run school system from experiencing religion as an important part of being human and as a source for personal development, it also deprives the state and schools of any means of influencing the religious development of its youth and society as a whole, making them easy prey for religious sectarians or extremists. As the other cooperative systems in Germany, Austria and Belgium in general, the *RUfa* system also keeps the state neutral, but nevertheless gives state and school an influence upon the religious education of its next generation to promote personal development, (inter)religious understanding and even cooperation.

Hamburg is more similar to the English system of religious education. There, state officials negotiate on a local level the syllabus, etc. with religious communities. However, in England the religions do not have the final say. This is different in the German-Hamburg system where the legal framework with the more binding responsibility of the religious communities guarantees a more solid status of the subject in the school system and thus a higher standard in teaching. In most German *Länder*, who organize religious education in separate religious education programs, this solid status is more and more threatened by a dwindling church membership. Since the Hamburg approach pools the students of all religions together, it ensures sufficient participation even in light of increasing secularization. However, the less institutionalized religions become, and the more the membership rate decreases, the more questions are raised in regard to the legitimacy of religious institutions

to speak for religions. The English system with its more flexible institutional structures might give some answers.

In recent decades, Europe also saw countries (like Norway, Finland, Luxembourg or Switzerland) shift from a church-linked confessional religious education to an ethics-based education with varying degrees of religious elements. At first glance it looks like a good way to provide basic education in religious questions to all students in a secular society, thus avoiding the French exclusion of religion from school and at the same time refraining from sharing power with religious communities. However, in class, religion is only a minor topic and lacks the depth of elements of confessional teaching which is needed to achieve substantial understanding, making this approach hardly religious. By excluding religious communities from cooperation in the running of religious education in state-run schools, it also fuels those who favor a reclusive position in society, thus weakening the religions' contribution to maintain social cohesion. Here, the Hamburg approach of shared responsibility shows its strength by forcing all partners to cooperate and giving them space to share their perspectives in all schools.

The legal–political framework has a decisive influence on the didactical–practical approach it allows and enables.

A world religion approach can be found in the syllabus of many countries, even in those without a separate school subject. In England it started with the phenomenological approach of Ninian Smart, which over time was modified in many ways (Smart 1968; Bauer 1999). World religion approaches keep a neutral observing perspective on religion and tend to depict religious practice and belief systems without involving students in a personal exploration aiming for commitment. Although it prepares students for a multireligious society, it does not provide a substantial understanding of any religions since it is the subjective appropriation which makes religion valuable and meaningful. Although *RUfa 2.0* provides an understanding of the religions in the students' environment, it wants more than to inform them about religions. In order to overcome the mere descriptive–observing attitude of the world religion approach, it is grounded on the theologies of each religion rather than on religious studies. It encounters other religions via dialogue and changing perspectives. Furthermore, it focuses on the development of the religious self-understanding of each student by allowing them to explore the meaning of religious traditions themselves. Although Ninian Smart proposed to take the inner perspective into account, he opposed elements of confessional learning. *RUfa 2.0* takes these elements and combines them with a more multifaith approach.

The interpretive approach of Robert Jackson (Jackson 1997, 2009; Bauer 1999) relies on ethnographic studies of British religious communities to overcome stereotypical or normative representations. In school, students learn by linking and interpreting three levels of religions: the individual perspectives of their followers, community life and religious tradition. By this, students reflect on their own self-understanding and are “edified”. While *RUfa 2.0* takes up interpretive elements in its learning process, it relies more on the religious traditions and their established educational tools than on ethnography which remains only in a descriptive, not a religious, mode. *RUfa* bypasses an outside tool like ethnography (or any other methodology of religious studies) and arranges a direct encounter with religion(s). Hence, at the core of *RUfa 2.0* are not objectified “religions” but their narrations and theological concepts, their performance and ethics, which are explored in a dialogical mode and are bound back to students' personal self-understanding. *RUfa* aims not only for edification but for personal commitment without forcing it upon students. It can, however, learn from the interpretative approach of how to arrange and combine a multitude of different elements of religion in learning processes.

The pedagogical approach of Michael Grimmit and John Hull (Hull 1996) puts the learning *from* religion on center stage. For them, religious education has to serve the children in their personal development rather than giving them merely information *about* religion. In their “A Gift to the Child” approach, they developed tools for an intensive engagement with religious artefacts which in many ways come close to learning processes

in *RUfa 2.0*. In light of the legal–political framework in England, Grimmit/Hull have been criticized for abandoning religious neutrality and overwhelming children with (other) faith(s) and, therefore, developed many tools of positioning students towards artefacts of different religions. Although *RUfa 2.0* must not be afraid of such a reproach, since it does not conceal its confessional grounding, it can draw on Grimmit/Hulls approach for arranging the encounter with artefacts and other elements of religions.

5. Conclusions

The Hamburg *RUfa 2.0* approach demonstrates the power of sharing. Sharing development in the realm of religious education brings together religious communities and a much wider circle of society. A common history of twenty or more years provides a foundation for understanding and common action, even in times when war and hate in other parts of the world threaten the understanding between local communities in Europe. Sharing responsibility is a continual practice in listening and explaining to others and in searching for common ground and practical solutions. Although a complex challenge and endeavor, sharing learning within the framework of a shared syllabus provides a long-term solution to communal disintegration. Sharing teaching requires trust and leads to trust in the teachers regardless of the religion they belong to. Finally, sharing challenges and a common future reinforce the need for combined action.

The Hamburg experience can be summarized in four theses:

Sharing religious education is possible. Sharing religious education is surely not a simple task. It needs open-minded religious communities guided by theologies to constitute the dialogical approach and the respective teaching content. It requires a complex curriculum and teachers with a dialogical attitude who are trained in teaching not only their own but also other religions in modern differentiated teaching arrangements. However, a shared religious education can be realized within a long-term shared development where many of the preconditions might emerge with time.

Sharing religious education allows and strengthens dialogical shaped identity. Many fear that shared religious education leads to weakening or even abandoning one's own religion. It can be the opposite, because nobody lives alone. Students develop their identity in the encounter with their classmates by experiencing differences and explaining their understanding of their religion—provided that this encounter is embedded in learning arrangements where they can acquire sufficient knowledge and understanding of their own religion. This form of identity is, however, shaped by a dialogical attitude, by a sense of shared values and by acceptance of pluralism and rejects an understanding of identity along separated and hostile communal lines.

Sharing religious education enables religious communities to adapt to pluralistic society. Secularization, migration, pluralization and individualization mark modern societies and dissolve traditional religious milieus and modes of religious education. While some religious groups try to defend long-gone privileges, others retreat into neotraditional, fundamentalist segregation. Sharing religious education, however, opens religions to the pluralistic social environment of today, marked by encounter, exchange and dialogue across cultural, ethnic and religious boundaries in school and society. It also transforms the mode of religious learning and teaching into contemporary school standards.

Sharing religious education convinces secular society and the state of the value of religion and religious education. In large parts of the secular public, media and politics in Europe, religions and religious communities are regarded as superfluous remnants of a long-gone past or as migrants' baggage from backward foreign countries which endanger freedom and peace in the here and now. This puts religious education fundamentally in question. Shared religious education, however, tells a counter-narrative. The religions themselves join in a common project to overcome frictions which are in many cases not rooted in religion but in politics or economy. Shared religious education becomes a peace project, a model and school for life in a pluralistic society where in many areas a dialogical attitude is necessary.

Amal Jakobi, the Muslim teacher cited in the beginning, concluded her speech on the Hamburg Religious Education for All approach with the following words: “And now let’s imagine that Hamburg schoolchildren grow up and then shape our future with an attitude of respect, tolerance and diversity of faith and life. That is good news for our city, here on the Elbe, and hopefully it will spread: that diversity does not threaten us, but is our strength, and that we enrich each other in an open and peaceful coexistence” (Jakobi 2023).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Agucenoglu, Hüseyin, Jochen Bauer, and Sarah Edel. 2023. Multitheologische Aus- und Fortbildung für den Religionsunterricht für alle in Hamburg. In *Religionslehrer:in im 21. Jahrhundert*. Edited by Martin Heller. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, pp. 299–312.
- Bauer, Jochen. 1999. Zwischen Religionenkunde und erfahrungsorientiertem Unterricht. In *Neuere religionendidaktische Konzeptionen in England*, 2nd ed. Münster: Waxmann, pp. 249–73.
- Bauer, Jochen. 2014a. Die Weiterentwicklung des Hamburger Religionsunterrichts in der Diskussion zwischen Verfassungsrecht und Schulpädagogik. *Zeitschrift für evangelisches Kirchenrecht* 59: 227–56. [CrossRef]
- Bauer, Jochen. 2014b. Kritische Authentizitätsorientierung als religionsdidaktisches Prinzip. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie* 1: 25–34. [CrossRef]
- Bauer, Jochen. 2019. *Religionsunterricht für alle: Eine multitheologische Fachdidaktik*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Bauer, Jochen. 2022a. Konfessionelle Kooperation und Religionsunterricht für alle 2.0: Eine Verhältnisbestimmung. *Religionspädagogische Beiträge. Journal for Religion in Education* 45: 47–59. [CrossRef]
- Bauer, Jochen. 2022b. Religionsunterricht für alle 2.0. *Religionspädagogische Beiträge Journal for Religion in Education* 45: 33–43. Available online: <https://rpb-journal.de/index.php/rpb/article/view/238> (accessed on 1 June 2024). [CrossRef]
- BSB—Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung. 2022a. Hinweise und Erläuterungen zum Rahmenplan Religion. Available online: <https://www.hamburg.de/resource/blob/123146/b685d9a15cce7105684fded2acf219d7/rel-he-dl-neu-data.pdf> (accessed on 20 March 2024).
- BSB—Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung. 2022b. Rahmenplan Religion: Grundschule. Available online: <https://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/16762712/3fda9d0b690e4984bc7c1f6a021063d0/data/religion-gs-2022.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- BSB—Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung. 2022c. Rahmenplan Religion: Gymnasiale Oberstufe. Available online: <https://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/16762802/22fadde35dea80d7c540667312c52f74/data/religion-gyo-2022.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- BSB—Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung. 2022d. Rahmenplan Religion: Gymnasium Sekundarstufe I. Available online: <https://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/16762910/4b668ef9164ba4166b9505e7cc26e55b/data/religion-gym-seki-2022.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- BSB—Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung. 2022e. Rahmenplan Religion: Stadtteilschule. Jahrgang 5–11. Available online: <https://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/16762934/aa3e5050f91649ea8bb65953512e2a52/data/religion-sts-2022.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg. 2012. *Mitteilung des Senats an die Bürgerschaft: Drucksache 20/5830*. Available online: https://www.buergerschaft-hh.de/parldok/dokument/38534/1_vertrag_zwischen_der_freien_und_hansestadt_hamburg_dem_ditib_landesverband_hamburg_schura_rat_der_islamischen_gemeinschaften_in_hamburg_und_dem_verb.pdf (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- Dalferth, Ingolf. 2004. Religion und Wahrheit. In *Wahrheit in Perspektiven. Probleme einer offenen Konstellation*. Edited by Ingolf Dalferth and Philipp Stoellger. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Federal Ministry of Justice. 2022. Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany in the Revised Version Published in the Federal Law Gazette Part III, Classification Number 100-1, as Last Amended by the Act of 19 December 2022 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 2478). Available online: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/englisch_gg.html (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- Härle, Wilfried. 2019. *Religionsunterricht unter pluralistischen Bedingungen: Eine kritische Sichtung des Hamburger Modells*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Hull, John M. 1996. A Gift to the Child: A New Pedagogy for Teaching Religion to Young children. *Religious Education* 91: 172–88. [CrossRef]
- Jackson, Robert. 1997. *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Jackson, Robert. 2009. Studying Religions: The Interpretive Approach in Brief. References Updated 2012. Available online: <https://theewc.org/content/uploads/2020/02/Studying-Religions-The-Interpretive-Approach-in-Brief.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- Jakobi, Amal. 2023. Speech at the German Unity Day service on October 3, 2023 in Hamburg. Available online: <https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/gottesdienst/oekumenischer-gottesdienst-zum-tag-der-deutschen-einheit/das-erste/Y3JpZDovL2Rhc2Vyc3RILmRIL2tpcmNobGljaGUgc2VuZHVuZ2VuLzlwMjMtMTAtMDNfMTAtMDAtTUVTWg> (accessed on 1 June 2024).

- Jozsa, Dan-Paul, Thorsten Knauth, and Wolfram Weiße, eds. 2009. *Religionsunterricht, Dialog und Konflikt. Analysen im Kontext Europas*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Kemnitzer, Konstanze, and Martin Roser, eds. 2021. "All Together Now!": Ein Schreibgespräch zum Religionsunterricht in Hamburg (RUfa 2.0). *EZW-Texte: Bd. 271*. Berlin: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen.
- Knauth, Thorsten, and Wolfram Weiße, eds. 2020. *Religionen im Dialog. Ansätze, Kontexte und Impulse zu dialogischem Religionsunterricht*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Kuhlmann, Birgit. 2020. Die Weiterentwicklung des Religionsunterrichts für alle 2.0 in Hamburg. In *Religionen im Dialog. Ansätze, Kontexte und Impulse zu dialogischem Religionsunterricht*. Edited by Thorsten Knauth and Wolfram Weiße. Münster: Waxmann, pp. 315–29.
- Lorenzen, Stefanie. 2020. *Entscheidung als Zielhorizont des Religionsunterrichts? Religiöse Positionierungsprozesse aus der Perspektive junger Erwachsener*. Praktische Theologie heute 174. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Riegel, Ulrich, Sarah Edel, and Sarah Delling. 2024. Position Taking in Learning from Religions and Worldview. In *Religion, Learning, Literacy. Theories and Concepts for 21st Century*. Edited by Martin Ubani. London: Palgrave.
- Smart, Ninian. 1968. *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*. London: Faber.
- Wißmann, Hinnerk. 2019. *Religionsunterricht für alle?* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Wolff, Jutta. 2018. Gesamtbericht/Kurzbericht Evaluation "Weiterentwicklung des Religionsunterrichts für alle". Available online: <https://ifbq.hamburg.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/803/2024/03/gesamtbericht-religionsunterricht-fuer-alle.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2024).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.