

Natascha Bettin

Institute of catholic theology, Dortmund University, Germany

natascha.bettin@tu-dortmund.de

“REA Annual Meeting” 07. - 09.2014

### **Unlearning violence “in the presence of the other”**

First empirical findings of a research project on prediction of violence against religious others through interreligious learning in Germany.

#### ***Abstract***

*Scientific interest in interreligious learning theories is highly topical. Whether pupils are learning to deal with religious otherness, with religious diversity or specifically changing self- and foreign-perception as an outcome of interreligious learning settings of contacts is assessed in the analysis of the findings of this present study. 9 case studies (5 girls, 4 boys, M aged= 16) in 4 classes at two schools in Germany are the main data basis of the whole intervention study by now. Additional to this qualitative approach, about 50 pupils responded to a quantitative questionnaire. Analysis results show an attitudinal change concerning own and foreign religion through “the presence of the other” and are discussed as a form of prevention of misunderstandings of the religious others as potential source of violence.*

#### **Theoretical Framing**

*The interreligious learning discourse in dialog with psychological theories of attitudes*

The pedagogies of interreligious learning aim at challenging pupils to deal with the otherness of the religious other and more specific to un-learn stereotype thinking or even change negative attitudes as a form of prevention of violence in the context of religious diversity e.g. by creating contact zones<sup>1</sup>. These big ideas are convincing in theory, but leave open the question of real learning outcomes that need to be proved and analyzed with empirical data to discuss the chances of learning arrangements of contact zones within RE. Below the theoretical basis is given to bring theories of RE and psychological theories together to structure the learning arrangement of encounter with a Jewish person during a synagogue visit in RE for young catholic pupils, which is mainly the content of the currently presented research.

*Un-learning violence via religious education? Un-learning violence against the religious other via interreligious education?*

To claim a contribution for un-learning violence (prevention) by religious education, the first issue is to define the term violence and conditions of developing violence. Violence is often defined (in social psychology) as a form of aggression with various manifestations of physical, verbal or passive nature. It creates always a relation of victim-perpetrator and is primarily multi-causally determined. Various scientific disciplines focus on different (complementary) explanations. The following ones provide the basis of the considerations for this research project: *the theories of attitudes* in the paradigm of personality- and social-psychology. The psychologist and one of the most important scientists of theories of attitudes, Gordon Allport (1954), describes the most influencing factor in the emergence of violence:

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Rothgangel 2013,169.

"The development of hostile stereotypes"<sup>2</sup>. The unreflective application of perceived prejudices or negative stereotyping of groups, e.g. a group of religious others, can lead to violent reactions e.g. by means of verbal or physical discrimination in a situation in which someone is perceived negatively. If one wants to prevent violence by applying this perspective of theories of attitudes and its influence on behavior (un-learning violence), the question is how one can prevent the development of negative prejudices (attitudes) or even may change existing ones.

"The most important theory regarding stereotype change within social psychology is the *contact hypothesis*"<sup>3</sup> by Gordon Allport (1954)<sup>4</sup>. Thomas Pettigrew, a student of Allport, added to Allports' popular "four *conditions* for optimal intergroup contact: equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and authority support", four *processes* of changing attitudes through intergroup encounter: learning about the outgroup (1), changing behavior (2), generating affective ties (3), and ingroup reappraisal (4)<sup>5</sup>.

*What conclusions can be drawn especially for the RE from this psychological view on the prevention of violence?*

Transferred to the domain of interreligious learning those *processes* can induce that learning new things can correct views on the e.g. different religious group (1), but also "other processes are involved"<sup>6</sup> like behavior modification in a new situation as a "precursor of attitude change"<sup>7</sup> (2) e.g. by creating a new situation of dialog with outgroup-members e.g. in a synagogue. If intergroup contact leads to, for example, friendship, positive emotions can also correct negative attitudes (3). Additional new perspectives can also "reshape view of your ingroup" (4)<sup>8</sup>. If these processes are taking place in an interreligious learn-arrangement of contact, like visiting a synagogue and meeting a Jew there, then there is theoretically a potential of changing attitudes and an opportunity to discuss the unlearning-of-violence-effect by this.

When adopting the approach of psychological theories to interreligious learning arrangements it becomes obvious that making use of these ideas in the context of RE is a great chance to fulfill central aims of RE: (e.g.) dealing with the religious diversity in real life without violence or prejudice (un-learning violence) in an increasing religiously pluralistic world in Europe.

In order to prove the compatibility of ideas from psychological theories with theories on RE, the following describes more detailed matters of interreligious learning theories.

The scientific interest in this topic is high and highly topical, as a glance at the most recent literature shows. Lots of designed models to structure the construct of interreligious competence (e.g. Willems, 2011, Schambeck, 2013), extrapolations of theories of interreligious learning through formulations of learning aims, didactic and methodological considerations or learning conditions (Roebben, 2011, Sajak 2013) illustrate the urgent interest in interreligious learning. The following abstract gives a short survey of the common central ideas in the discourse of interreligious learning theories:

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<sup>2</sup> Lind, 1993, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Stangor et al. 1996, 664.

<sup>4</sup> Pettigrew 1998, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Pettigrew 1998, 70.

<sup>6</sup> Pettigrew, 1998, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Pettigrew, 1998, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Pettigrew, 1998, 72.

Interreligious learning can be initiated for example by 5 steps: First by detecting different religious beliefs, second by interpreting religious phenomena, third by learning through encounter with an expert of another religion, fourth by trying to respect the permanent strangeness and fifth by furthering personal religious beliefs.<sup>9</sup> Central aim is to make inter- and also intra-religious learning possible. “Learning in the presence of the other” (which is the comprehensive designation of this inter- and intra-religious learning process, according to Roebben 2013, 162-164, following the work of Mary C. Boys) should initiate the tolerance for religious others and should also be taken as a challenge for a better understanding of one’s own religiosity. The concrete entrance to these experiences of ambiguity and tolerance is through creating contact zones.<sup>10</sup> Constructs of interreligious competence are formulated to concretize even more the aims of interreligious learning: the competence of perspective changing, “*Relations- und Diversifikationskompetenz*”<sup>11</sup> (competence to make distinctions and even to put them in relation to oneself) and competences like basic knowledge about different religions, the competence to indicate all-day-situations, if they are characterized by divergent religious point of views and the competence to deal within those situations, to be able to act in an adequate way by articulating the own religious point of view, but also to note different religious points of view and to have the competence of ambiguity to deal with these differences in a reflective way.<sup>12</sup>

Additional to this short summary of the interreligious learning discourse, explanations of learning theories within the intercultural paradigm, that is often reviewed in the context of interreligious learning paradigm, show compatible ideas: Intercultural learning aims at developing the own self-concept in a way that includes reflecting self- and foreign-perception, and additionally even expected self- and foreign-perception from a religiously different person.<sup>13</sup>

To bring the given basics of theories of inter-RE together with the ones of attitudes and attitudinal change [through the four processes mentioned above: learning about the outgroup (1), changing behavior (2), generating affective ties (3), and ingroup reappraisal (4)], the religious pedagogue Martin Rothgangel lined out the changing of attitudes as a central aim of interreligious learning<sup>14</sup>: The concern of interreligious education focuses on the shift of negative attitudes towards religious others into positive ones.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously it could be shown by now, that preventing violence against people with a different religion, means preventing the formation or the changing of negative attitudes – for which psychological theories outline the effect of contact in learning arrangements and which is even exactly one of the concerns of interreligious education by learning in the presence of the religious other.

### **Working-Hypotheses**

Referring to the ideas of the four processes of attitudinal change in a contact situation (*Pettigrew: psychological paradigm*), in combination with the aims of interreligious and intercultural education (*Willems 2011, Schambeck 2013, Roebben 2011, 2013 and others: interreligious learning paradigm; Thomas 2014: intercultural learning paradigm*) –

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<sup>9</sup> Ziebertz, Leimgruber, 2007, 439f, 441.

<sup>10</sup> Ziebertz, Leimgruber, 2007, 441.

<sup>11</sup> Schambeck, 2013, 174.

<sup>12</sup> Willems, 2011, 168, 169.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, 2011, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Rothgangel, 2013, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Rothgangel, 2013, 168.

especially of reflecting self- and foreign-perception – the following hypotheses are formulated to show direction for the analysis of the empirical research, that focuses especially on effects of attitudinal change through the encounter with a Jewish person in his sacred space, the synagogue.

- I. *Attitudes towards a foreign religion can be changed while contact through the process of “learning about the outgroup – the Jews” (process 1).*
- II. *Attitudes can be changed by changing behavior towards Judaism (process 2).*
- III. *Attitudes can be changed by generating affective ties towards Judaism (process 3).*
- IV. *Attitudes can be changed by the process of ingroup reappraisal of the own religion (4).*

## **Method**

By relying on a broad literature based framework (of a religio-psychological and religio-educational nature), this doctoral thesis works inductively by formulating hypotheses to structure the field of interreligious learning in a sacred space of a religious other, but also by using the methodological procedure of mixed methods to evaluate hypotheses. This so called intervention-survey includes qualitative interviews, quantitative questionnaires and structured observations at different times, which are split in a pre- and posttest, that frame a short teaching-unit to prepare the pupils for the encounter with a Jewish person during a synagogue visit and also the synagogue-visit itself.

### ***Participants and procedure***

While the whole sample of the doctoral thesis (until now) summarizes 9 case-studies and about 50 questionnaires – that are not all analyzed yet – now just reference is made to one case study as an excerpt of the entire work. The catholic boy aged 16 is a pupil at a „Gymnasium“ in Bochum, Germany. All data were collected across 3 weeks per class. Questionnaire completion took approximately 45 minutes, interviews 10 to 20 minutes. In presenting this one case study, the author realizes that this provisional research report has serious limits and needs to be completed by several other cases. This is at least the final intention of the PhD-thesis!

### ***Psychometric Measures***

All measured variables, representing the learning-setting, can be allotted to 3 different groups: input-factors, process-factors and output-factors. While the variable of attitudes of the Christianity (self-perception of own religion) and the attitude of the Judaism (foreign-perception of other religion), are input- as well as output-factors, the variables “knowledge”, “behavior”, “emotions” and “reappraisal of the own group” frame the process-factors of Pettigrew`s theory. All variables are measured by quantitative (questionnaire) and by qualitative approach (interviews). The items and questions in the questionnaire ask partly for open answers and M-C-Forms. Regarding theories of measuring attitudes, answers also should be given within formats of the Likert-technique<sup>16</sup>. The questions of the interview are mostly open and partly created by imagining being part of a short illustrated story, choosing pictures or place aspects of own and foreign religion on a target.

## **Findings**

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<sup>16</sup> e.g. Diekmann, 2009, 240.

The following analysis is only one short excerpt of the whole data-set of the complete PhD-survey, which is not analyzed yet.<sup>17</sup>

**What can be *learned new* about Judaism by creating contact-zones like visiting a synagogue and encountering a Jewish person within inter-RE in school? (process I)**

Regarding the *questionnaire-items* concerning *facts of the Judaism*, a look at a special item called “*exclusion principle*” offers clues to what is *learned new*: Pupils are asked to sort out, which of the following things do not belong to Judaism: baptismal font, the Ten commandments, star of David, Chanukah-candlestick, kippah, thora-role or calligraphy of surah 1. 55%<sup>18</sup> of the pupils answered first: baptismal font and the Ten Commandments, after visiting the synagogue they corrected their answers into: baptismal font and calligraphy. The Ten Commandments are perceived as an attribute of their own religion – Christianity – and pupils answer by using the exclusion principle (*in case of ignorance?*). So, pupils use their own religion as a kind of *contrast-sheet* to sort which things belong to their own and the foreign religion – first. After visiting the synagogue and talking to a Jewish person, they become aware that different religions – Christianity and Judaism – have also something in common.

*More results...*

Asking for the meaning of the word “*synagogue*”, pupils should choose out of the following set: holy house, house of books, house of memory or house of convention. 32% of the pupils gave the correct answer even before the intervention. 40% of the pupils answered first “holy house” and after intervention “house of convention”. In case of ignorance, pupils use the facts, they know about their own religion (holy church in the context of Christianity) to transfer this to the foreign religion – *they use their own religion as a kind of “sheet”* first. Afterwards pupils built a new concept of the synagogue from a different point of view.

Summarizing analysis of more items concerning facts of Judaism show: Pupils do associate after intervention more details e.g. of the tora-role, the tora-shrine, the denotation of rabbi and tallit. The denotation of the prayer “Schma Israel” and the “date of the Jewish year” are also learned new. Most of the pupils have a concept of “tora”, the “women-gallery”, “kosher” and “parting milk and meat”, “Shabbat”, “kippah” as a sign of “respect” even before the intervention.

Additional to the quantitative analysis, a look at the case study provides the following results: The boy changes his way of agreement towards the item “*Judaism is a lively religion*” by using the likert-scale first with 2 (little), after intervention with 5 (very strong). Additionally he agreed with the item “*Judaism is a religion from the past,*” first with 5 (very strong) and second with 1 (not a bit). His concept of Judaism in combination with concepts of vitality changed through the intervention to the very opposite. More information about the boy’s attitude are given by the answer to the question “*What meaning has faith for Jewish people?*” First he claimed faith “gives power”, after intervention he said “a lot, depending on their faith”. By contact while the synagogue-visit his first concepts of function of religion are overwritten by concepts of emotional meanings. Additional general concepts are relativized in terms of “depending on”. More evidence for a re-generalization-strategy gives the item: Complete the following sentence *I am a Jew, Judaism is.... for me*. First he completed “my religion and my life”, afterwards with “my religion, depending on their faith also diverse”.

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<sup>17</sup> Data-set of the current analysis are 25 pupils of three different RE classes.

<sup>18</sup> 55%: 13 of 24 pupils, which are at this time the sample of analysis. Data set will get more pupils. 37% of the pupils were wrong at both measuring-times.

Regarding first the hypotheses-assumption it can be stated by the quantitative and qualitative approach, that most pupils changed their cognitive basis and concepts of their attitude (*foreign-perception*) by *learning partly anew*. Analysis also shows evidence for *relearning* facts, changing concepts or dedications and even for re-generalization-processes. Evidence for *process 1*, which is also compatible with the concept of interreligious competence of basic-knowledge, is given.

#### **Are there changes in the behavior or imagined behavior<sup>19</sup>? (process 2)**

By creating (for the pupils of this RE-classes) a *new situation* of dialog with a Jewish person in a synagogue there is even by this a change of their behavior towards the attitude-object "Judaism". Additionally the agreement to following items changed: I could imagine living some time in a Jewish family (first: 31% choose 3 (middle) and 13,8% 2 (less), second: 28,% choose 2 (less) and 21,4% 3 (middle). Imagined behavior changed from conceivably to more un-conceivably after contact. Imagining the attendance at a Jewish church service change in the same way from first 4 (strong) (32, 1 %) to 3 (middle) (28,6%).

Evidence for process 2 is given in a way that imagined behavior changed from conceivably to not conceivably – experienced strangeness during visit and encounter may be an activator for this and needs to be discussed.

#### **And does such a learning-arrangement generate emotions? (process 3)**

Formulated items to operationalize the construct of foreign-familiar-emotions show the following results via quantitative approach<sup>20</sup>: *I can imagine Jewish faith* or *I can imagine Jewish life* as a predictor for familiar feelings changed through contact from point-3-agreements (51% first item; 27% second item) into point-4-agreement (50% first item; 53% second item). *Judaism is strange to me* was agreed with 2 (less) first by 27,5% and afterwards by 35,7%. These items show that pupils get more familiar with Judaism through contact. More items within this item-set concerning the food rules show opposite results.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence for process 3 is given and needs to be discussed in the context of chances to unlearn violence.

#### **Does contact lead to a new perspective on the ingroup (process 4)?**

Allocating aspects of own and foreign religion on a target, visualizing the own person in the center, the following changes can be shown as the result of the intervention via the case study: It is not that just aspects of the foreign religion, like Jewish life, synagogue or kosher eating are closer to the own person, but also aspects concerning the own religion like *church* (first at 5<sup>th</sup> ring, second at second ring) and *church service* (first: 5<sup>th</sup> ring, second: second ring) are associated to be very/more close to one's own life and person after intervention.

Asking for the view on Christianity the boy answers first by using the following aspects: *one* religion, not being *strongly* religious. Afterwards he mentions the following concept: *my religion of birth*, not being *strictly* religious, supporting religions because they include human rights, observing them out of respect for god and not to displease him. The accessed picture of his own religion changed by using the foreign religion as a kind of information source: getting

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<sup>19</sup> „imagined behavior“ represents the category „changing behavior“ cause even imagined behavior or intended behavior represent behavior-construct within attitude-theories (e.g. Ostrom, 1989, 13).

<sup>20</sup> Item-sets get a cronbachs alpha about .795 and .764.

<sup>21</sup> *Food-rules are irritating me*: 24 % of the pupils show agreement on the likert-scale with point 3 (middle) and afterwards even 35,7%.

to know anew that being Jewish is a question of birth and getting information about the rules for life in Judaism – the boy transferred this view to his own religion. In contrast – he uses the presentation of a *strict* life as a contrast sheet to re-built the picture of being *not strongly* religious into being *not strictly* religious.

Regarding the item “Christianity is foreign for me” the boy first agreed with 5 (very strong) and afterwards only with 1 (not a bit).

Taking a look at anticipated foreign-perceptions from a Jewish point of view at Christianity, the boy said first it’s a different religion, different set of beliefs, afterwards he added the fact of being a daughter-religion. A concept of thinking in commonalities is accessible.

Having a look at this short selection of self-perception of the own religion, gives evidence for process 4 on cognitive and emotional dimension during contact in the synagogue.

### Discussion

Detected attitudinal change in various dimensions and different forms through visit and encounter present new elements in the discussion on the contact hypothesis in the context of inter-religious learning in school and needs to be more scrutinized as a form of prevention of misunderstanding religious others as a potential source of violence: *Is there a change of un-learning violence via inter-RE by means of visit and encounter?*

The following abstract gives a short overview of potential questions for presentation at REA conference 2014 in Chicago, which will be also supported by new analysis results by then.

Is there a chance of being more competent in dealing with religious otherness and diversity through the presented form of contact to un-learn violence (aims of inter-RE)? *[Analysis-results showed e.g. effects of creating more detailed concepts of the foreign religion and also changed views e.g. of Judaism as a lively religion.]* Is there also the chance to become more competent in a way, that pupils can make distinctions but also can put these in relation to oneself (“Diversifikations- and Relationskompetenz”) as a form of unlearning violence? *[Results show an effect of using the foreign religion as a contrast-sheet and on the other hand also as a kind of information-source, e.g. in processes of re-formulating the position of one’s own religion]* Can this be seen as a step forward to learn empathy, being aware of and reflect self- and foreign-perceptions (*intercultural learning theories*) and develop a religious faculty of speech to un-learn violence? Can changing of concepts of differences [*e.g. exclusion item*] and re-learning processes of deleted commons [*concept of holy*] and e.g. re-imagining attendance at a Jewish religious service be seen as aspects of respecting permanent strangeness and furthering personal religious beliefs in a way of identity-building through contrast-experiences (*5 steps of inter-RE*)?

All these questions should be discussed on a larger scale of new ideas regarding empirical results for formulating new aspects in a “didactic of the other” e.g. taking the opportunity of emotional change towards the attitude-object for opening deeper processes of prevention of building negative attitudes (or even changing existing ones) and even of becoming more interculturally and interreligiously competent in our pluralistic world.

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