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Measuring Religious Competence: The Berlin Study

1. Background

Religious literacy was often disputed in German religious pedagogy. In the beginning of the new century, general education science as well as subject didactics led an intensive debate about the possibility and the usefulness of measuring competences of pupils (still nowadays, for instance Radtke 2016; Cortina 2016). While the supposedly "hard topic" subjects jumped on the literacy-train very fast, the so-called "soft"-subjects, or as Heinz-Elmar Tenorth named them, "useless subjects", like arts or music or even Religious Education, led a broad debate about the meaningfulness of the concept of literacy. Especially in religious pedagogy, this debate was intense (Fischer and Elsenbast 2006). In 2003, an expert group around Eckard Klieme formulated cornerstones for the literacy debate, insofar as they defined standards and competences specifically for school and schooling. At the same time, the first federal states in Germany also formulated subject-specific competences in their curricula including Religious Education (Baden-Württemberg 2004; Fischer and Elsenbast 2006). The prevalent problem with these partly rather sophisticated concepts was that they were not based on empirical research and that they can hardly be used to assess pupils' religious competences. Yet, the possibility of assessment was one of the core criteria of Klieme's expertise for subject-specific competences.

As a result, a small interdisciplinary group of researchers from religious education and general education aimed at developing a testable model of religious competence. Dietrich Benner and Rolf Schieder, Joachim Willems and Henning Schluß developed a project application for the German Research Foundation (DFG), titled: "Quality assurance and educational standards for Religious Education in public schools, the example of Protestant Religious Education" and after approval in 2006, Roumiana Nikolova and Thomas Weiß joined our research group. Even before the project was accepted by the DFG, we discovered a mistake in the title of our own project: It cannot be the task of a research project to develop any educational standards, i. e. to normatively prescribe what pupils in the public school system have to learn. Rather, we sought to find out in this and the subsequent research project (1.) whether it is possible to develop and to empirically validate a model for religious competence, (2.) the religious competences of pupils in Brandenburg and Berlin, especially those taking part in Protestant Religious Education, and (3.) empirically

validated formulations of difficulty/complexity levels of subject-specific religious competence.[1]

2. The Study

The Model of Religious Competence

In defining religious competence for our purposes, we refer to Franz E. Weinert and Jürgen Klieme: Competences are "cognitive abilities and skills possessed by or able to be learned by individuals that enable them to solve particular problems, as well as the motivational, volitional and social readiness and capacity to utilise the solutions successfully and responsibly in variable situations" (Weinert 2001, 27; the translation into English is taken from Hartig et al. 2008, 309). Subject-specific performance standards and competences are defined as follows:

> Performance standards "specify goals in terms of competence requirements, and define the competencies students should possess at a specific point in their schooling as far as important goals of schooling are considered as successfully achieved. Thus, they are designed with the aim of achieving cumulative systematically integrated learning. [...]"
>
> Standards "concentrate on core areas" and "define what is obligatory for *all of the* areas" [...]. "The competence requirements are structured systematically into competence models with various levels of competence, representing aspects, levels, and processes of competence development. [...] They are embodied in a more concrete form in tasks and testing procedures that can be used to provide a valid measure of the level of competence students have achieved." (Harting et al. 2008, 309)

As holds true for other subject as well, Religious Education is more than the sum of its core competences. Through this model of religious literacy, we hope to mark a cognitive core of the subject as other school subjects do.

In our model, we distinguish two components of religious literacy: religious interpretive competence and religious participative competence. Both parts include religious knowledge because without it, neither a religious interpretation nor the capacity for religious participation is possible.

Religious interpretive competence means the ability to adequately interpret religious phenomena (texts, images, artifacts, actions) and to adequately interpret phenomena from a religious perspective and situations that are not necessarily regarded to be 'religious'.[2] In this sense, it is not necessary to be a believer in order to

1 Research project BE 361/8-1 funded from 02/2006–07/2007 and BE 361/8-2 funded from 08/2007 to 05/2010 by the German Research Foundation, cf. Benner, Schieder, Schluß and Willems 2011.

2 In fact, in a non-essentialist view "religion" is constituted by acts of interpretation when the world is interpreted *sub specie aeterni*. Then, a miracle does not occur in those cases when the laws of nature are expired, but when someone relates a situation that can also be categorized as 'luck' or 'coincidence' to his or her overarching worldview so that it refers (in this context) to God.

be religiously competent in terms of interpretive competence. In essence, religious interpretive competence consists of hermeneutic skills.

Religious participative competence is defined as the ability to act and interact in situations in which religion is relevant in some way. Someone proves to be religiously competent in terms of participative competence when he or she adequately participates in religious ceremonies or discussions about religion, but also when he or she refrains from religious actions with good reasons. In this sense, it is no prerequisite for religious participative competence to be a religious person. And it is, certainly, disputable what 'adequate' could mean in this context. It might happen that it is in some situations more adequate to be rude, stubborn or unruly than to act in a conventional and polite way. Or, in other words, someone proves to be religiously competent when he or she is able to give good reasons to justify his or her behavior as 'adequate'.

Religious interpretive competence	**Religious participative competence**
Religious knowledge / Knowledge about religions	

Table 1: Levels of religious competence

These two components of religious competence relate to three subject areas:
1. the religion or denomination to which the specific Religious Education refers;
2. other denominations and religions;
3. religion in society and culture.

The first subject area is, in our case, Protestant Christianity. Depending on the number of pupils who belong to other faith communities, also other denominations and religions are involved in the teaching of Religious Education subjects. Hence, in some federal states, there is also Islamic Religious Education, Jewish Religious Education, Greek Orthodox Religious Education for Eastern (Byzantine) Orthodox pupils, Syriac Orthodox Religious Education, Alevi Religious Education or others (Willems 2015, 27). It is important to note that, according to the EKD (Protestant Church in Germany), Protestant Religious Education is open for pupils from different religious and worldview backgrounds. These pupils are invited to come into contact with Christian faith, traditions, and theology and to learn about and from them without being missionised (EKD 2014, 98).

Religious competences with regard to the subject matter of "other denominations and religions" includes both knowledge about other denominations and religions, and hermeneutic skills to deal with interreligious and intercultural phenomena.

The third subject area, "religion in society and culture", takes account of the fact that

- religious traditions became part of secular culture so that their religious character at present may be disputed. (Do the shops in Germany have to remain closed on Sunday due to the Christian significance of this day and due to the Ten Commandments or because of the societal significance of a generally binding day of rest? In this case, you have to distinguish between the genesis and prevalence.)
- religious and non-religious factors in society are intertwined (for example, Islamic banking can be regarded both as an economic phenomenon, and as a religious one).
- undeniably non-religious phenomena like migration policy or specific methods for medical interventions can be viewed from a religious or theological point of view.
- a broad definition of 'religion' allows to identify religious elements also outside of faith communities and beyond conventional religious semantics (for example, if 'football' is analysed as a 'religious' phenomenon with congregations, rituals, confessions, deities, heroes and saints, mythical narrations and so on).

The Construction of Testable Tasks

Test tasks can detect students' capabilities, however, the answer does not indicate whether the tested skills have been acquired in or outside the lessons.[3] For the assessment of religious competence with multiple choice items it was necessary to formulate distractors that can be clearly identified as wrong from the scholarly perspective of theology or religious studies. This is quite easy with regard to knowledge about religion, but much more difficult in the case of items to assess religious interpretive competence. In this case, the task descriptions of single items must stimulate the pupils to religiously interpret something or to interpret a religious phenomenon, respectively. Those distractors that are unambiguously wrong from the scholarly perspective then tend to be obviously absurd. Therefore, it was the challenge to formulate distractors that seemed to be to a certain degree plausible, at least for those pupils who do not know the right answer.

A similar problem occurred with regard to items for the assessment of religious participative competence. Also here, the distractors had to be unambiguously wrong from a scholarly perspective but also plausible for the less competent pupils. In this context, the valuation of the distractors as 'wrong' certainly had to be based on more than conventions or attitudes. Several attempts to develop items for the assessment of religious participative competence failed, because the skills to find the right answers turned out to be rather interpretive skills than part of a purely participative

3 In contrast to test tasks, there are didactical tasks to initiate teaching-learning processes, as well as to structure and cultivate reflection and to expand the respective experiences of pupils. This happens through planned description of what is known to encourage experimenting and learning.

competence. Therefore, it was not possible to develop a model for levels of religious participative competence in the research project.

Finally, we arrived at a pool with over 100 test items for all three subject-areas to be evaluated and pretested at least twice. By this means, we developed a test instrument with four different questionnaires for two difficulty levels, which included some common anchor tasks. This way it was possible to compare both the levels of complexity of the items, and the level of competence of the pupils.

Example Items

An example for the religious knowledge tasks is:

What are the five pillars of Islam?
A) Creed, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage
B) Charity, fasting, the veneration of saints, pilgrimage, prayer
C) Pilgrimage, fasting, charity, creed, prohibition of images
D) Creed, charity, prayer, pilgrimage, psalms

This item does not assess religious competence but merely knowledge about religion, in this case about Islam. To find the right answer, it is sufficient to reproduce 'facts'. These facts might not even be understood. It may happen that a pupil knows the right answer but has no idea when and how a Muslim observes the fasting. Nevertheless, it makes sense to assess knowledge, because without knowledge both, interpretation and participation are impossible. If, for example, Muslim pupils in a school demand to use a room for prayer, the disputants should know that according to a mainstream interpretation of Islam it is a religious duty to perform a specific prayer (salat) five times a day in a ritualised way and that this prayer has a certain significance for Muslims as one of the five pillars. Knowledge about the Islamic prayer is also a precondition for Christians to compare forms of prayers in Christianity and Islam and discuss this topic adequately with Muslims.

The second example is an item for the assessment of religious interpretive competence. For it we used some biblical parables as vignettes and created tasks for each vignette. The following task is related to the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt 20, 1–14). The test leaflet contained the text and the question how the workers who worked longer feel about the landowner. The following answers were provided:

A) The landowner is unjust, because they had to work all day.
B) The landowner is unjust, because he pays all workers the same hourly wage.
C) The landowner is unjust, because he pays all workers the same day wage.
D) The landowner is just, because he pays all workers the same day wage.

The difficulty of this task lies in the landowner thwarting the common ideas of good economy and justice. That, then, may possibly have consequences for the economic doings of people with each other in a world still unsaved.

To address this task, hence, pupils need to be able to differentiate between economic and religious rationalities, as well as relate both interpretations to each other. For that, they need non-religious competences: reading, understanding the terms of hourly wages and daily wages, etc.

Example three is an instance for a *participative task*. The context is a vignette of an interreligious discussion at school organised by the pupils. Again there were different items. Our example is an invitation for discussion given to the youth of the Jewish and the Muslim congregations:

Now you are inviting Muslim and Jewish pupils. You have the following sentences to choose from. Which ones are suitable for your invitation? Mark the correct sentences!

A) We hope that a common conversation will enrich all of us.
B) We want to look together if your religious belief is true.
C) We want to ask you questions about your religion, because there are a lot of things that we do not understand.
D) Because you belong to a religious minority, you shall even have the opportunity to talk with us.
E) We should look to a common future and ignore the past.
F) We would like to know from you what questions our religion raises for you.

Religious competence is far more than knowledge about religion. The example above explains nicely how knowledge about differences among religions alone will not yield a positive answer. In addition and possibly as a basis even, linguistic ability as well as empathy and willingness have to be applied together in order for the pupil to respond in a manner acceptable to the measure "correct" for this task.

3. The Survey

In October and December 2008, the main survey was carried out in 62 schools in Brandenburg and Berlin. We tested 1,600 pupils attending 10th grade. The sample in Berlin included both pupils who attended Protestant Religious Education, as well as (a smaller group of) pupils who only attended the obligatory ethical-education-lessons. In Brandenburg, mostly Religious Education pupils were tested, but also a smaller group of pupils attending the subject LER.[4]

4 LER is an abbreviation that could be translated as 'Life questions – ethics – knowledge about religions' (Lebensgestaltung – Ethik – Religionskunde). In the early 1990s, during the time of educational reforms after the peaceful revolution in the GDR, this subject was intended to give pupils the opportunity to freely elect on fundamental life questions with reference to various religious and worldview contexts, to discuss value orientations and learn tolerant ways of communication and interaction. Initially, the subject was to have been taught in cooperation with religious communities, and attendance was to be compulsory for all pupils without the possibility to opt out. After severe disagreements between the Churches and the Brandenburg government, the Churches decided to cease cooperation and claimed for the implementation of Religious Education according to article 7 of the German Constitution. In 2002, LER supporters and their opponents came to a compromise mediated by the Federal Constitutional Court: LER remains a regular and compulsory subject, but confessional Religious Education is taught in Brandenburg as an elective (optional) subject, and those who attend Religious Education have the right to opt out from LER. (Willems 2015, 32)

The 90 minutes test was split in three parts: Part one contained all the anchor or core tasks, followed by part two with tasks that rotated in different versions of the questionnaire. In the last five minutes we placed items about the social, economic, cultural and religious background of the students. Experience with religion is not a topic of our questionnaires, but it is easy to see that these experiences in the family or in the parish can influence the results of the test. To identify such correlations, it is necessary to ask for the family background.

The interpretation of the results does not follow the classical test-theory, but the probabilistic test-theory, also called item-response-theory. The classical test theory supposes an exact relationship between the level of the given test answers and the competence level of the tested person. The item-response-theory, in contrast, deals with probability. A person, who can solve more (and more difficult) tasks than another, is seen as more competent, and a task that is solved by more persons is seen as easier. Both persons and tasks can be located on a Rasch-scale that shows how competent a person and how difficult a task is. If a specific person tries to solve a specific task, then he or she will succeed with a probability of 50% if the task and the person have the same position on the Rasch-scale. The possibility increases or decreases, respectively, with the distance on the scale between person and task. Or, in other words: the possibility, that a person can solve an item is an exponential function of the independent variables, of the person capability/ability parameter and the item difficulty parameter (Benner et al. 2011, 99).

One central aim of the survey was to construct a valid testing model for religious literacy and for that, it was necessary to prove the theoretically developed test-model empirically. We needed to know if it was possible to differentiate the three different scales – participative competence, interpretive competence and religious knowledge – not only theoretically but also in empirical evidence:

> "For adequate empirical testing of the dimensionality assumed in the theoretical competence model, we specified and compared three, two and one dimensional measurement models. Using ConQuest (Wu et al. 2007), we determined the deviance of three competing psychometric models from the empirical data matrix and undertook a statistical model-fit-check. We sought the model that showed the least deviance with the fewest number of parameters. [...] The two-dimensional model was found to be the best way of representing the empirical data, both with regard to psychometric criteria as well as due to the small number of useful participation items. As a result of examining the dimensionality, two Rasch scales were formed and normed which measure religious basic skills (RGK) and religious interpretive skills (RDK). The latter encompasses seven

test items that were conceptualized as religious participative skills (RPK). These seven items ask for strong content knowledge for the interpretation and did not show significant differences between tasks about participative and interpretative competence. Hence, we accepted these tasks for the second scale and named them religious interpretative competence (RDK) within the empirical description of the model. In summary, two remaining dimensions are separable with the latent correlation r =.84. The three dimensional option carried latent correlations of r =.84 for RGK and RDK and r =.74 between RGK and RPK as well as r =.88 between RPK and RDK." (Benner et al. 2011, 101f.)

Compared with other models of religious literacy with eight or more part-competences, our theoretical model was rather slender. Criticism addressed this point, claiming that our model does not include enough differentiation. However, the empirical survey concluded it is not possible to find significant evidence for the splitting of even the two part-competences of our model so the more problematic it seems to split religious competence in more than these two in hopes of a clear, significant difference.

From a theoretical point of view, we maintain our decision to distinguish two different part-competences. But empirical evidence points to a person at a specific level in religious interpretive competence having a high possibility in religious participative competence at the same level. Finding this strong relationship was only possible by building tasks for both part-competences separately.

One interesting result of the survey is that there is not only a strong correlation, but also a significant difference between having knowledge about religion and having the capability to deal with this knowledge. We found a clear difference between the knowledge in the field of religion and the ability to apply it ambitiously. What teachers have always known is that it is not enough to teach religious knowledge or knowledge about religion, but it is also necessary to teach how to deal with it, and how to answer new questions.

Levels

Inspired by PISA, we clustered the items of the religious interpretive competence scale in five different difficulty levels. In the beginning, this is not a theoretical but an empirical step. The frequency of solving a task shows how difficult it was. In a next step it is necessary to identify which skills are required to solve the items in contrast to the items of the other levels.

Not each item with a specific difficulty matches this description of the levels. Sometimes an item breaks out of this logic and it is not easy to say why. This is often a sign for a wrong and unclear construction of the item and it is good to take a closer look at the task. Sometimes the used terminology was not familiar to the pupils or the topic had not been part of the lessons.

The difficulty level allows a prognosis as to how difficult an item with specific characteristics will be. So it should be possible to construct items with a specific difficulty level.

Level I	Pupils can understand religious texts and rituals that show relations to conventions and experiences of their everyday lives.
Level II	Pupils can understand the concept inherent in religious texts and facts, even if these texts and facts are not directly related to their everyday experiences.
Level III	Pupils can understand texts and facts from different religions; they can change points of view between them and can discuss problems of interpretation with the different religions and in public.
Level IV	Pupils can understand religious topics and concepts in religious and non-religious contexts. They can compare competing interpretations by changing the perspective between different positions. They are able to reflect this process and can move beyond their own expectations.
Level V	Pupils can interpret religious terms and facts from different viewpoints, as for instance economics, politics or ethics, and they can judge in the light of these viewpoints.

Table 2: Competence Levels (Benner et al. 2011, 126)

4. Further results

We shall present only a selection of our results in this chapter and analytically place them within their context of the German school system. Contrary to the comprehensive high school that is prominent in the United States, for example, the German school system is highly stratified as it separates into tracks after the common primary school.[5] Hence, results yielded from different school types have to be contextualized in relationship to the knowledge of often vast achievement differences of same age pupils who have attended different tracks.

Our results seem to confirm the results of other large-scale studies, i. e. that the competences of pupils at academic high schools are significantly better than at other school types. The respective center-value in Brandenburg as well as in Berlin is approximately one standard deviation better than in other school-forms.

Other variables show a meaningful difference as well. With regard to gender, we found that girls in both federal states and both school types are moderately better than their male schoolmates in the area of religious interpretive competence. In religious knowledge, both groups are nearly equal. We also asked for the religious background in the families to learn about the relationship of experiences from outside of school on the results of the test.

Most participants or their parents have a relationship (not necessarily formal membership) to the Protestant church (680). In second place, 620 pupils in total indicated no relationship to a religion.

As we supposed, a relationship with regard to religious background becomes visible and identifies the Protestant background as being a clear benefit for the test. Also, the group of Catholic students have clearly better values – even a little bet-

5 In Berlin and Brandenburg, the both federal states of our survey, the change to a secondary school is after the sixth class.

		Religious Interpretive Competence in school-types			
		M	*SD*	*N*	*d*
Berlin	academic high school	553.0	92.9	464	1.4
	other school types	433.9	83.3	505	
	total	*490.9*	*106.2*	*969*	–
Branden-burg	academic high school	519.9	88.1	560	0.9
	other school types	466.0	69.5	69	
	total	*514.0*	*8.9*	*629*	–
total	academic high school	534.9	91.7	1,024	1.11
	other school types	437.8	82.4	574	
	total	*500.0*	*100.0*	*1,598*	–
		Religious Knowledge in Types of School			
		M	*SD*	*N*	*d*
Berlin	academic high school	554.9	93.1	464	1.3
	other school types	442.1	83.5	505	
	total	*496.2*	*104.7*	*969*	–
Branden-burg	academic high school	510.0	93.4	560	0.5
	other school types	472.4	73.0	69	
	total	*505.9*	*92.1*	*629*	–
total	academic high school	530.4	95.9	1.024	0.9
	other school types	445.8	82.8	574	
	total	*500.0*	*100.0*	*1,598*	–

Table 3: Religious Interpretive Competence and Religious Knowledge (Benner et al. 2011, 103)

religion	*number*	*%*
Protestant	680	43.7
Roman Catholic	166	10.7
Muslim	39	2.5
Orthodox	14	0.9
Jewish	4	0.2
other	34	2.2
none	620	39.8

Table 4: Religious background of the pupils (Benner et al. 2011, 107)

Religious Interpretive competence	*1.*	*2.*	*3.*	*4.*	*5.*
1. Protestant	–				
2. none	0.5	–			
3. Roman Catholic	–0.1	–0.6	–		
4. Muslim	1.3	0.6	1.3	–	
5. others	0.5	–0.1	0.5	–0.6	–

Table 5: Average differences (effect sizes) controlling for religions / confessions

		Attending a church group			
Religious Interpretive Competence		*M*	*SD*	*N*	*d*
attendance	Boys	504.1	101.3	457	0.4
	Girls	538.6	90.8	469	
	Total	*521.5*	*97.6*	*926*	–
no attendance	Boys	459.4	98.4	273	0.2
	Girls	477.2	91.2	324	
	Total	*469.1*	*94.9*	*597*	0.5
		Attending a church group			
Religious Knowledge		*M*	*SD*	*N*	*d*
attendance	Boys	528.1	94.8	457	0.0
	Girls	531.3	97.9	469	
	Total	*529.7*	*96.4*	*926*	–
no attendance	Boys	450.9	90.5	273	0,1
	Girls	460.2	83.7	324	
	total	*456.0*	*86.9*	*597*	0.8

Table 6: Attending a church group (Benner et al. 2011, 111)

ter than the Protestants. We could find a strong relationship of taking part in the "Christenlehre"[6] or "confirmation lessons" with the results of the test.

Especially in the scale of knowledge, we see a clear benefit for the participants of church groups. In the case of the interpretation scale, we see a standard deviation of 0.5 and on the knowledge scale we have nearly a whole standard deviation with 0.8. A similar picture presents itself when we ask for religious experience in the family.

In most large-scale surveys, we find a strong correlation between the cultural interest of the parents and the test results of the children. The cultural interest is often investigated by asking for the number of books in the family. We also used this question and found a correlation between the amount of books and religious competence / knowledge (table 6)

6 A kind of Religious Education in the church congregation in addition to the school.

Religious interpretive competence	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. 0–20 books	–				
2. 21–50 books	0.5	–			
3. 51–100 books	0.7	0.2	–		
4. 101–200 books	0.9	0.4	0.2	–	
5. over 200 books	1,2	0.7	0.4	0.2	–
Religious basic competence	**1.**	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**5.**
1. 0–20 books	–				
2. 21–50 books	0.3	–			
3. 51–100 books	0.6	0.3	–		
4. 101–200 books	0.8	0.5	0.2	–	
5. over 200 books	1.2	0.8	0.6	0.3	–

Table 7: Average differences (effect sizes) controlling for books

Pupils with more books in the household score better on the test. It is not surprising and it is another indicator for the strong relationship of cultural background of the family and success in school. Even more interesting may be the influence of the school subject itself on the shown output (table 7).

We see that the children who took part in Religious Education from the primary school[7] into the secondary school show the best results. Pupils who only took part from the 7th school year brought in slightly lower results and pupils with Religious Education lessons only in primary school were surprisingly not even as good as pupils who never took part in Religious Education.

Religious Interpretive Competence	*M*	*SD*	*N*
in primary school and in secondary I	519.8	93.2	1006
only in secondary I	500.0	96.7	348
only in primary school	413.2	84.6	96
no RE	418.0	85.0	85
Religious Knowledge	*M*	*SD*	*N*
in primary school and in secondary I	523.3	95.0	1,006
only in secondary I	486.3	90.3	348
only in primary school	411.4	77.9	96
no RE	415.5	78.3	85

Table 8: Averagesin relationship to participation in Religious Education (Benner et al. 2011, 116)

7 Elementary education in Berlin and Brandenburg encompasses grades 1 to 6, unlike most of the other federal states.

These results seem to show that instruction in school makes as much of a difference as social and cultural background does. Yet, we merely see the outcome in the test performance but we do not know how the knowledge and the competence were acquired. It is possible and rather plausible even that pupils attending Religious Education from the first grade on come from religious family backgrounds ensuring they attend the facultative Religious Education class. And maybe these are mostly those who hold a lot of cultural or social capital expressed through small private libraries and/or additional educational activities (music, dancing, confirmation classes, etc.)

In cases where the school instruction might have a strong influence, other influencing factors cannot be disregarded. Rather, these different variables may reinforce each other, thereby pointing to the Gospel of St. Matthew: "For unto every one that hath shall be given" (Mt 25, 29). This holds true for the entire educational system, yet Religious Education seems to be no different either.

5. Implementation

A substantial fear related to international large-scale assessments were the normative implications of empirical research and the evidence proved this fear to be warranted. Following PISA, every school subject formulates standards and competences. In case of the 'hard' subjects, the "Institute for Educational Quality Improvement" (IQB)[8] does a lot of the work mostly by taking over PISA's architecture. For the subjects of the "second order", specific competence models have been developed by researchers from the related subject didactics, although standards should be regarded as a public affair and a duty of education politics, not to be formulated by expert groups behind closed doors (Schluß 2011).

At first sight, the Berlin study is an example within this pattern, because the curriculum in Berlin and Brandenburg was developed with nearly the same part-competences. The participative competence in the curriculum is called "Handlungskompetenz" which means the competence of action, a leading term in the whole curriculum, also in the other subjects. As the curriculum development of facultative Religious Education rests with the Church, it was not necessary to take over the term from the governmental curriculum, but in order to mark Religious Education as a school subject like others it was important to deal with the same terms. The meaning of religious participative competence and religious action competence was fairly identical. In fact it was not a hostile takeover of the educational politics by empirical research but both cooperating in a profitable way. The curriculum makers saw the possibility to form standards by learning from the empirical survey that provided pupil data about present competences. The survey cannot decide, however,

8 The Institute for Educational Quality Improvement (IQB) is a scientific institute of the German federal states at the Humboldt-University of Berlin where pupil achievement tests are developed.

what kind of knowledge and competences *should* be acquired by the pupils. This was the task of the church curriculum commission. It seems like a good division of labor between research and politics, as Jürgen Baumert (2016) announced it.

Traditionally, curricula do not last much longer than ten years before it is time for a new one. Hence, a new curriculum is presented based on a completely different competence concept. At its center, it has "religious narrative competence", and we are cautious, as we see no empirical evidence in this new competence model of religious education yet. So evidently there is no reason to worry about the hegemony of the empirical religious pedagogy, especially regarding imperialism of large-scale surveys.

These changes also do not mean as much as they claim to as we know from the debate about the curriculum reform in Hessen. Vollstädt, Tillmann, Rauin et al. (1999) have shown that the direct influence of any curriculum reform to real school lessons is nearly undetectable as curricula come later to the school mostly in form of textbooks. But in Berlin and Brandenburg, textbooks from other federal states are in use. Textbooks specifically for Berlin and Brandenburg have not been developed due to the exceptional status of Religious Education in these federal states and the resulting small numbers of students.

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