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"They won't get anywhere with this position!"

Reflections on the "attitude" of religion and ethics teachers

The role and significance of religion and ethics teaching in the various types of schools in Germany has been the subject of constant debate and changing perspectives for many decades.[1] In addition to existing theological and religious education considerations, political and ideological reasons have certainly also played a role in this respect.

It was also necessary to take account of the heterogeneity and plurality in classrooms and, in accordance with Article 7, Paragraph 4 of the Basic Law, to offer religious education or religious studies lessons—such as on Islam—to other religious communities as far as possible.[2] At the same time, the increasing diversity of topics in education has always been accompanied by attempts to create cooperative offerings out of that abundance of topics. Sometimes this

1 The calls to abandon religious education at the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, the gradual introduction of ethics lessons in the individual federal states and the establishment of subjects such as LER in Brandenburg, which were due to the specific conditions of East Germany in 1992, can be cited as examples of the way in which these discourses led to readjustment on this issue. In this context, reference should be made to Islamic religious education. This has been particularly evident since the 2000s in the debates and efforts to introduce Islamic religious education in schools in various federal states. The introduction of Islamic religious education has a long history. However, relevant progress has only become visible since the convening of the German Islam Conference in 2006. Since then, however, the debate on denominationally orientated Islamic education has not been concluded.

2 Federal Ministry of Justice 2022, § 7 Abs. 4 GG.

has been done out of conviction in terms of content, but much more often due to a shortage of content or an emergency situation. In all these processes of change, one common tendency can be identified, in a somewhat simplified way: for a long time, the more or less openly expressed self-interests of the churches and religious communities with regard to religious education were in the foreground and the movement for ethics education saw itself as one that fought precisely against this religious appropriation of the public education sector, but beyond these struggles, the pupils and their needs moved into the focus of the discussion.

The following questions were at the forefront of the discussion:

1. What religious, ethical and ideological education do pupils need in their respective living environments?
2. To what extent do the pedagogical and content-related efforts of the subjects involved contribute to the overall task of public education with regard to peaceful social coexistence?

These and similar questions, in combination with a society that is becoming more religiously and culturally pluralistic per se[3], have increasingly led to attempts at cooperative collaboration, particularly in the religious spectrum, especially in urban regions. In addition to denominationally cooperative approaches, such as those in Baden-Württemberg or North Rhine-Westphalia, this happened most extensively in the so-called Hamburg model, which is now known as religious education for all (German: Religionsunterricht für alle – Rufa 2.0). All of these models and projects have been extensively evaluated and researched from different perspectives in recent years. Corresponding teaching materials have been designed and tested. These efforts have been flanked by broad-based student surveys on the importance and impact of ethics and religious education.[4] In contrast, the role of teachers in this process of change has received little attention, at least if one assumes that the establishment of possibly obligatory further training on this topic is not already proof of attention. Even today, the consequences of this changed or changing educational landscape for the relevant teacher

3 Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 2024.

4 For example: Schweitzer 2018.

training courses or the traineeship period are only being drawn slowly or sporadically.[5]

However, if there is a will to prepare future teachers for their task in a no longer uniformly denominational or mono-religious teaching environment during their studies and traineeship, the question arises as to the content of such preparation. The same naturally also applies to teachers who have already been in the profession (for a long time) and who would like to adapt to changes in their professional field with the help of the further training courses on offer. In addition to the suggestions on the pedagogy (German: Didaktik) and methodology of religious education in heterogeneous learning groups, which still characterise the majority of the training and further education measures offered, the term "position" (German: Haltung) is also increasingly appearing in the research literature on religious education. Position seems to be the aspect on the part of the teacher to which particular reference must be made in this context.[6]

However, the term itself is not used uniformly; rather, the terms position and habitus are sometimes used synonymously in relevant publications.[7]

Generally speaking, the psychological term attitude (German: Attitüde) refers to the relatively stable, conscious and situational positions, opinions and orientations (German: Einstellung) of a person towards thematic references, objects and other people, etc., which are cognitively accessible to the respective bearer and can be confused and changed by external influences. However, this potential, cognitively accessible changeability of an attitude may be more difficult if conscious convictions are believed with internalised certainty and defended against other positions. In this respect, such attitudes that are resistant to conviction, coupled with an absolute claim to validity, would be a hindrance, especially with regard to religious education in an interreligious context, if the aim there is to meet the different faith orientations of students with empathy and appreciation in the sense of a professional pedagogical position. Here, the teachers' "attitude of conviction" should take a back seat in order to give the necessary space to understanding the students' faith and

5 Cakir-Mattner et. al. 2022, 47 f.

6 Altuntas 2014, 46. Also see: Mendl 2015, 37–50 / Riegger/Heil 2017.

7 Gaus 2023. Also see: Altmeyer/Grümme 2018.

value orientations in a non-judgemental way. In this respect, against the background of a general understanding of attitudes, future religious educators should be sensitised to the awareness and thematisation of attitudes and their potential effects in the interreligious educational setting in order to give space to an open position towards what remains different in oneself.

While attitudes are usually cognitively accessible, subject-related positions and related "opinions" that can be changed through insight, an incorporated habitus and its "distinctive characteristics" in the Bourdieuian sense are to be understood as the result of a psychosocial as well as social and cultural imprint within the framework of the primary socialisation sphere of family/milieu. In concrete terms, this means that the acquisition of habitus takes place in the course of the cultural and material imprinting of a family, which constitutes the habitual characteristics of a person through identity formation.[8]

This means that the sociological term "habitus", introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, describes a societal/social classification or differentiation feature that is understood as the "incorporation of class position", including the associated symbolic capital that the respective social subject habitually appropriates as incorporated capital of origin against the background of their socio-cultural lifeworld, which manifests itself in a related lifestyle (taste, aesthetic attitude, behavioural and mental attitudes, etc.) and which they use to more or less consciously identify themselves as belonging to a certain social group.[9]

In this respect, people from different cultural and religious backgrounds each have a specific, religiously connoted "ethnicised habitus", which must be recognised as a strategy for reflection and action on the part of (inter)religious practitioners—both in training and teaching—in the sense of habitus and diversity sensitivity. This must therefore be taken into account with regard to the students entrusted to them as well as with regard to the teachers' own habitual orientation in the context of the pedagogical debate. This addresses a "professional habitus" in the context of teacher training,

8 Bourdieu 1982, 39 f./166/175.

9 ibid.

through which the prerequisites for profession-specific habitus formation towards a "specific professional ethos" are laid down by a teacher addressing and becoming aware of their own habitual peculiarities.[10]

In principle, however, it can be stated that the reflections on habitus usually associated with the name Pierre Bourdieu, as the model of mediation between culture and practice in the sense of human dispositions that function as patterns of thought, perception and judgement in everyday life, have only hesitantly found their way into theological considerations connoted with religious education in the past. If the topic of position or habitus does emerge, it is always where religious education is discussed or formatted from the perspective of interdenominational and interreligious demands on teaching and learning content.[11] With a view to the responsibility of religious education, for example with regard to questions of educational justice, Stefan Altmeyer and Bernhard Grümme, for example, present initial considerations on the reception of Bourdieu's concept of habitus in religious education.[12] The establishment of a form of religious education capable of addressing heterogeneity is a central concern for them and their resulting approach to Bourdieu is more than purposeful. They rightly point out that religious education teachers are also actors in the social space and that their milieu-specific or habitual influences have a significant impact on their teaching activities. Altmeyer and Grümme thus set themselves apart from other common assumptions, not only in religious education, which place the question of the significance of positions in teaching/learning settings primarily in the field of professionalism research.[13] The question of the significance of the phenomenon of position or habitus in educational processes, especially in educational arrangements with religious implications, must not be negotiated at the level of a professionalisation offensive for teachers. The phenomenon of the religious, which has become increasingly multifaceted in recent decades, does not offer a sufficient target area for a

10 Becker-Lenz/Müller 2009.

11 Eppenstein 2022, 234. Also see: Herwartz-Emden/Waburg 2012, 479 / Projektgruppe "Interreligiöse Religionspädagogik" 2020.

12 Altmeyer/Grümme 2018, 248–267.

13 Gaus 2023, 25–49.

professionalisation strategy, not least because the teachers to be professionalised always remain part of the phenomenon for which they are then to be trained and further educated. It is precisely this circumstance that Pierre Bourdieu's research refers to in many places, as he repeatedly shows in various contexts that social differences are consolidated and reproduced precisely through the educational sector in terms of the symbolically mediated capital in the respective social background.[14] The different positioning of those involved in educational processes in the social space justifies the different approaches to shaping it. Educational institutions will not succeed in changing or minimising this inequality.[15] This circumstance is theologically challenging for two reasons: firstly, because belonging to a particular religious or denominational community may cement one's position in society and thus prevent change; secondly, because the structurally determined classification of people in a society often represents a historically outdated state, the justification for which often also has religious implications. However, this is fundamentally at odds with a sustainable form of theological anthropology.[16] Such a form of anthropology cannot be conceived without the assumption of the general equality of human beings before God and thus also in human interaction. Thus, Altmeyer and Grümme rightly conclude at the end of their essay that:

> Religious education is thus challenged, in the spirit of ideology critique, to deal self-reflexively with its involvement in hegemonic contexts of normativity and power and only then to actively do justice to its involvement in the complex relationships of religious education and enlightenment. Therein lie perspectives for a religious education that sees itself led to its conceptual limits in view of the interdependencies of religious plurality and social divergence. Bourdieu has not yet fulfilled his potential, especially in the struggle to establish a religious education capable of heterogeneity.[17]

However, if the discourse on the position or habitus of religious education teachers is not to be limited to a debate on questions

14 Bourdieu 1982.

15 Scherr 2018, 465–469.

16 Koran 49, 13 / Takim 2016, 11.

17 Altmeyer / Grümme 2018, 263 f. Transl. Caroline Beierle.

of educational justice and equal opportunities, an attempt must be made to grasp and describe the processes of change that are sought at the habitual level, and which may also occur unconsciously. In other words, the following is an attempt to take a closer look at Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic capital", as the interaction of social, economic and cultural capital on which prestige and social status are based, and to ask why this conglomerate so tenaciously shapes everyday life and the educational landscape. The deliberate use of the English term "attitude" in the following initially seems like a play on words to emphasise the claim of this being something new or at least different. However, what is actually new about the reflections on "attitude" is a philosophical positioning that does not take the classical route via the Aristotelian concept of hexis (as a position of choice),[18] but instead starts with the help of Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations". The focus here is on Wittgenstein's idea of linguistic action as cultural games. In the words of Clemens Sedmak,[19] cultural games can be understood as follows:

> Cultural games are determined by (also a linguistic grammar and) a social grammar and a "grammar of belief"; the player's beliefs shape the game (…). Beliefs, the "grammar of belief", are also the final, inviolable foundation of cultural games, the point at which the spade hits the rock and bends back (PU 217).[20]

This reference initially seems naïve if it is understood as equating the concept of position with the "grammar of belief" in order to then designate it as "attitude". Added to this is perhaps the theological seductiveness that could arise from the term "belief". What is decisive, however, is the categorization into cultural games, i.e. everything that exists in a certain social space in a broad sense as proven rules of (communicative) interaction: the functioning of a society according to rules that simply exist and are observed.

In this setting, the grammar of belief initially describes something like the motivational level of participation in the social game. "Worldview assumptions, life-sustaining basic convictions, moral values and religious beliefs form the motor and the moving force

18 Kurbacher / Wüschner 2016.

19 Sedmak 1999.

20 ibid., 176. Transl. Caroline Beierle.

of social life, which cannot be reduced to a set of instructions."[21] All of this together forms the pattern of individual "grammars of belief" in a highly individual and, at the same time, highly connectable way. The question of the extent to which the "grammars" are (pre-)shaped by the cultural games played and to what extent the "grammars" shape and determine the cultural game in the first place must, of course, be asked.[22] It seems crucial to summarise the motivational level beyond the boundaries of individual aspects. In other words, the challenge lies in the search for a motive that is more than the sum of individual motives from areas such as morality, religion, tradition and culture, which have become embedded in them as possible facets of the "grammars". Such a superordinate level of motives can be identified in line with Rahel Jaeggi's reflections on the phenomenon of life forms. She describes life forms as "complexly structured bundles (or ensembles) of social practices aimed at solving problems that are themselves historically contextualized and normatively constituted."[23] The point here is the emphasis on the reference to practice, which becomes even clearer when Jaeggi describes the success of a way of life: "Such a perspective makes the criterion of success less substantive aspects of content and more formal criteria that focus on the rationality and success of the process thus described as an ethical-social learning process."[24] The meaning of a social practice that follows the rules of the respective "cultural game" played within a way of life, driven by the "grammar of belief", then arises through its actual practicability. If this no longer comes to light for the individual, the rules of the social game and ultimately also the "grammar of belief" begin to falter. The possibility of remaining part of society and thus part of the "cultural game" solely through certain practices motivates these practices; social participation or participation in a certain way of life is the determining motive, which is initially independent of any substantive interpretation or foundation.

Up to this point, the setting appears highly static, as the focus so far has tended to be on the singular form of life. However, societal

21 Sedmak 1999, 176. Transl. Caroline Beierle.

22 ibid., 176 f.

23 Jaeggi 2023, 58. Transl. Caroline Beierle.

24 ibid. Tansl. Caroline Beierle.

or social reality only ever recognises life forms in the plural. From this perspective, being human always means participating in different forms of life that exist at the same time, which are not always strictly separated from one another. Rather, there are grey areas, fluid transitions and mutual dependencies between the forms of life and thus tensions that the individual must integrate into his or her existence in a moderating way. With the addition of this experience, namely that the boundaries of a form of life can never be concretely determined and that there can be no all-encompassing form of life in a society alone, the question of the criteria and reasons that lead to the change or disappearance of a form of life becomes more acute. Jaeggi's approach of linking the internal critical capacity of a way of life to its practicability seems highly plausible. This means that the life form itself is able to react self-critically to changes and to change. If this possibility remains unused, a process begins that leads to the complete disappearance of the life form: It is no longer needed as a coping mechanism within society as a whole. The life forms therefore react actively to the changes in society as a whole, as part of which they always contribute to these processes of change. In other words, people's desire for a sustainable practice in everyday life dynamises the critical examination of the normative, cultural, religious and ethical implications and "habits" within that way of life. Reasons for this can be the emergence of competing ways of life, which are accompanied by new social challenges in economic, political, technical, ecological, etc. areas.

Based on this, the aspects discussed so far can be categorised as follows: the basic phenomenon on the individual human level is the "grammar of belief", which experiences validity and resonance on a second level in the various forms of life in which the individual is involved in a formative and participatory way. This second level is characterised by the "cultural games" that enable processual action, communication and reflection within and between the forms of life. The totality of these movements can then be described as the culture of society as a whole. Bearing in mind the problems associated with the concept of culture, it is used here solely as a descriptive term for society as a whole, the boundaries of which are themselves difficult to grasp and have a clearly osmotic character. What is crucial to understanding this classification is the assumption of a permanent reciprocal dynamic between the individual levels, which, as

already mentioned above, is causally due to coping with the practice of life.

However, this does no more than attempt a structured view of a basically monadic society that has been cut out of the diverse totality of ways of life that form society. This assumes a framework that seems fixed, but does not exist in this form; thus, however, the "grammar of belief", the ways of life and "cultural games" do not have a contoured frame of orientation either. It is therefore to Clemens Sedmak's credit that, in his 1999 essay "The cultural game of watching the game"[25], he further developed this initial analysis interculturally on the basis of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and his terminology.

This encounter and reciprocal interpenetration of cultural systems requires learning processes from those involved or affected. Possible rapprochements and possibly necessary arrangements for living together always involve understanding and learning previously foreign cultural practices and playing (still) foreign "cultural games". Ultimately, in such encounters, the practicability of the ways of life affected is fundamentally put to the test. In his considerations, Clemens Sedmak has made it clear that the structure of the "cultural games" played in the forms of life are basically designed to be learnable, but this is accompanied by an exciting shift. By no means, according to Sedmak, do games and players remain unaffected by the encounters. In other words, a player who is used to moving safely within their own cultural game, and who can generally trust their own grammar of belief or does not see it called into question, can learn the "cultural game" of another culture—but not without changing it and their own traditional one.[26]

The crucial question for the term of attitude is now whether the processes of change that cannot really be questioned within intercultural discourses also reach the grammar of belief. In other words, how deeply do the changed rules of the game and the way of playing according to them penetrate the "player"? This question arises all the more sharply if, as described above, the impetus for change is essentially attributed to pragmatic reasons—precisely in order to pre-

25 Sedmak 1999.

26 ibid., 176.

serve the forms of life concerned. According to Sedmak, a reciprocal learning process between "cultural games" is possible in principle, because

> At a deeper level, common human contexts of action [...] can be identified; in every culture there are ritualized cultural games for the basic processes of life: Food intake, reproduction, cult, hierarchy, education. On this basis, the basic function of foreign customs can be identified.[27]

In addition to the possibility of identification and the resulting ability to play along in an inherently foreign "cultural game", the new players also change the established rule system of the "game" in which they now participate. In a first step, they may only play the game a little differently according to the existing rules in order to adapt it to their traditional playing habits in this area. In a second step, however, all players can also change the rules based on the new heterogeneous starting situation of the game. Here, too, the changes are made for pragmatic reasons—the game should or must simply be played. The experiences the individuals have in the process then have a changing effect on their own game and give the traditional cultural framework a new character. In this sense, attitude can be understood as a phenomenon that is deeply committed to and determined by practice. Changes in attitude can therefore be understood as the result of reciprocal coping strategies and mechanisms that process experiences on a cognitive and emotional level from encounters between forms of life shaped by certain "cultural games". The extent to which these shifts and instances of reformatting of human deep grammar can be empirically proven, and the extent to which they can be initiated in the context of schools and educational processes (especially in religious and ethics lessons) through conscious learning through encounters or dialogical learning should be examined more closely in the future from at least two perspectives: firstly, with regard to changes in one's own religious beliefs embedded in the "grammar of belief", the character of which may be more kaleidoscopic and less elaborately theological. Accordingly, teachers encounter their students as representatives of their own beliefs and not primarily as ambassadors of the institutionally tangible faith of

27 Sedmak 1999, 181. Transl. Caroline Beierle.

a religious community. On the other hand, with recourse to Bourdieu's theories, the question of power and power asymmetries in the social space of education must also be raised—to what extent do the existing power dynamics between teachers and students, especially with regard to their culturally stabilising religious and theological implications, influence possible and possibly necessary changes?

All these empirical studies on the attitudes of teachers and learners, which have yet to be conducted, are based on the fundamental assumption that social practice, in the sense of the dynamics described above, determines the teaching/learning processes in everyday school life to a much greater extent than the theoretical superstructure of cooperative teaching models available to date perceives. What needs to be shown in the future is the extent to which it is possible to make those affected aware of the unconscious changes in human deep grammar, which guides perception and action, that ultimately result from socially provoked practical pressure. Through such "awareness", attitude becomes a variable in educational theory reflections, which can be used as an ever-fluid resource in the overall social "game" of life forms and its reflection in the educational context.

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