

May 2006

Muslim Children and the “Right to Religion”

The long road to Islamic religious instruction in state schools in Germany

Friedhelm Kraft

1. Introduction

Anyone who visits a school in Hannover or Berlin today will immediately notice one aspect that is characterising schools to an ever greater extent: Pupils with widely varying migration backgrounds often dominate the picture. Ethnic and religious plurality is an everyday phenomenon in schools and the question of who is in the majority, or minority, will certainly vary, depending on the neighbourhood or catchment area. Children of German extraction have become a numerical minority at the primary schools in Berlin's Kreuzberg district.

Religious education in the schools has by no means been left unfazed by this development. In many cases children of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds attend school and Muslim children make up largest group by far.

Although it is true that in many instances Muslim children attend either Protestant or Catholic religion classes, this is not the intention of educational policies; nor does it represent the will of the drafters of the German Constitution (*Grundgesetz* or “Ba-

sic Law”). According to Article 7.3 of the Constitution, religious instruction is a “standard” subject that “shall be taught in consensus with the religious denominations”. Consequently religious instruction is not a privilege reserved to the Christian churches. Religious instruction in school devolves from the fundamental right to religious freedom (Article 4 of the Constitution); freedom of religion is realised as a “positive” entitlement, contributing to self-development in school. It follows that all pupils are entitled to a religious education which corresponds to their religious convictions.

More than 600,000 Muslim pupils attend school in Germany. A curriculum in the spirit of Article 7.3 of the Constitution – Islamic religious instruction as a “standard subject” corresponding to the pupils' own faith – has not been implemented to date in any public school. The reason is as simple as it is complex. There is a lack of persons or organisations with which educational authorities can interface – institutions which, as per the wording of Article 7.3, determine and can represent the “fundamentals” of Islam and who enjoy the legiti-

misation of a recognised religious denomination.

As intractable as the situation might seem, the debate on religious instruction for Muslim children in Germany has taken on new dynamics in recent years.

There is no doubt about it. Statements of political intentions to install an adequate educational curriculum for Muslim children have been drawn up. A subject development consultation held by the Conference of the Ministers of Culture at Weimar in March 2003 formulated and found consensus in the following:

- The states are all in agreement that academic religious education for pupils of the Muslim faith is a part of the schools' mission.
- Several states have instituted courses in Islamic studies or are planning to offer such instruction. We feel it necessary that instruction be given in German. Muslims are calling for instruction in Islam, in German, in the spirit of the Constitution. But this subject can be launched only if Muslims in the various federal states form religious organisations which satisfy the requirements of the Constitution; what must be taken into account here is the fact that Islam is not constituted as a centralised [hierarchical] religious denomination.¹

The wording of the so-called "Weimar Appeal" is clear and unequivocal. Until such time as Muslims in Germany have joined forces in unified religious organisations or denominations, it will be possible only to expand the courses in "religious studies" for Muslim pupils currently being offered; they cannot be put on a new footing. Muslims will have to decide between "religious studies" and "Islamic religious instruction" in the spirit of Article 7.3 of the Constitution. A prerequisite for Islamic religious instruction is amalgamation to form a religious organisation. The realisation that Islam is not constituted as a "centralised denomination" initially precludes any demand to "form a de-

nomination", although the question as to which organisational forms are meant, forms which would be appropriate to Islamic tenets, remains unanswered.

But: The constitutional clarity of the wording reflects only in part the reality of the implementations which have already been installed.

There are several federal states which, in the framework of academic experiments,² are testing ways in which Islamic religious instruction can be offered in the schools. These experiments can, however, only to a limited extent be clearly assigned to the categories of "religious studies" or "religious instruction". And the status of development in the individual states could hardly be more divergent. While in Rhineland-Palatinate (Ludwigshafen) and Bavaria (Erlangen) pilot projects are being carried out at one school each and in Lower Saxony Islamic religious instruction is already being offered in 19 schools, Baden-Württemberg is planning for the first time in the 2006/2007 school year pilot projects at twelve primary schools in cooperation with local parents' associations and mosque-affiliated congregations. North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and Bremen have in fact taken another path. Since the 1999/2000 school year "Islamic tuition"³ has been offered, in German,

¹ Quoted after Martin Stock, 108.

² Translator's note: In the thoroughly regimented German school system the "academic experiment" is an experimental curriculum or educational concept introduced as a trial situation in specific schools. It is not a part of the official curriculum but is fostered as a means of identifying promising additions to the official curriculum.

³ Translator's note: For the purposes of this translation the term "religious instruction" is used to denote exclusively instruction organised and delivered by an established church or denomination. The term "religious tuition" applies to coursework organised and delivered by a government agency; the alternate terms "religious studies" or "Islamic studies" have essentially the same meaning but are used due to a minor differentiation in the German text. The term "religious education" encompasses all of the above.

as an independent subject; the number of participating schools is currently at 120. In Bavaria, beginning with the 2001/2002 school year, a pilot project on “Islamic tuition in the German language” has come to be offered at 21 primary schools. In Bremen a pilot project on Islamic religious studies has been running since the 2002/2003 school year. And in Berlin, as is so often the case, the situation is entirely different. There the Islamic Federation offers Islamic religious instruction for which the Federation is responsible. Such instruction is attended by more than 4,000 pupils.⁴

In the following comments I would like to use developments in Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony to elucidate the status, models and conceptional basis for the educational offerings for Muslim pupils in each case.

2. “Islamic religious instruction” – the academic experiment in Lower Saxony

Since the start of the 2003/2004 school year “religious instruction under the purview of the state”⁵ – this being the approach adopted by the Ministry of Culture – has been offered in Lower Saxony. This academic experiment has met with great acceptance and thus was extended to other schools in the 2005/2006 school year. Islamic religious instruction is being offered, in German, at a total of 19 primary schools;

⁴ In the state of Hesse the Islamic Religious Organisation of Hesse, acting as a “religious community”, submitted in May of 1988 a petition for the introduction of Islamic religious instruction. The Ministry of Culture for the State of Hesse rejected the petition. The Islamic Religious Organisation of Hesse also failed in its suit before the State Administrative Court in Hesse (in a decision handed down on September 14, 2005) in which it had appealed for recognition as the partner for Islamic religious instruction. No instruction for Muslim pupils is offered in the federal states in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

⁵ Rolf Bade/Edeltraud Windolph, p. 389.

no grades are given in this subject. Instruction is by teachers who have already – in the context of classes to teach the heritage language – taught subjects touching on the religion in the land from which the family comes and who, parallel to their teaching duties, have taken in-service training to earn supplementary qualification.

Forming the basis for instruction are the “Guidelines for the ‘Islamic religious instruction’ academic experiment”, prepared under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture for Lower Saxony. It was worked out, however, in “roundtable discussions” in which the major Muslim organisations and associations in Lower Saxony took part. In establishing a “roundtable for Islamic religious instruction” the Ministry of Culture created a body which, during the academic experiment, is to function as the “state’s contact in the central questions of the Islam faith”.⁶ The academic experiment has achieved particular significance and acceptance due to the fact that – in addition to the shura in Lower Saxony – the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Agency for Religion (DITIB) supports the project.

The academic experiment in Lower Saxony not only enjoys the unreserved approval of the Christian synods in Lower Saxony but has also attracted a great deal of attention throughout Germany. This is because the path chosen here achieves the greatest possible alignment with the requirements of the Constitution (Article 7.3). The Ministry of Culture at present sees the academic experiment as the only option since there is no religious community available for reference purposes and there is no “formal proof” of whether individual children adhere to a particular faith. During the academic experiment the parents’ or guardians’ enrolling the children in classes is deemed to be evidence of their association with Islam while the “roundtable” stands in for the missing “official contact partner”, normally a recognised religious community.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 390.

On the conceptualisation of the guidelines

Even though the roundtable participated in the preparation of the guidelines and although there appear to be prior drafts which were in part incorporated into the draft, the state of Lower Saxony alone is responsible for issuing the document. The guidelines do not represent an intra-Islamic dialogue on the goals and content of Islamic religious instruction, nor do they document a process in which understanding between the state and Muslim congregations in Lower Saxony was reached.

The didactic principle of “correlation” is adopted and becomes an objective of instruction:

- The purpose of the academic experiment in ‘Islamic religious instruction’ is to bring faith and the practice of faith together with the concrete situation and experiences of the pupils so that these aspects can reveal and explain each other (correlation principle). This eliminates both any blind acceptance and unthinking imitation of traditional forms for the practice of the faith and any unquestioning encounters with the oral and written traditions of the faith.⁷

This wording alone shows that – in addition to the fundamental educational objectives – the academic experiment is of significance to policy making for religious affairs. In this spirit the experiment has a preventive function in so far as certain negative developments associated with the adoption of Islamic traditions can be countered both in school policies and in the didactic aspects with the help of the academic experiment.

Moreover, the academic experiment in Lower Saxony demarcates itself strictly from “Islamic tuition” as is practised in Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia. Instead of “objective information about Islam”, this is to be religious education in which religious questions are explored “on the basis of the faith”. “In religious education Islam is

⁷ Guidelines for the “Islamic religious instruction” academic experiment, p. 4. See also Annex 1.

the object of both the encounter with faith and the subjective experience; informational elements and an education in religious values are equally at home here.”⁸

The question of defining the content of instruction is answered by the guidelines’ authors in three sequential steps. The starting point is the determination of what is to be seen as the core of Islam, as the “essential statements of faith among Muslims”; six articles of faith⁹ and their so-called “visible expression”, the five pillars of Islam, are named. (2) In a further step six topic areas are organised in teaching units which are assigned (in tables) to the four years of primary school.¹⁰ (3) In the final phase the guidelines formulate ten mandatory topics; the elucidation of their content makes up the bulk of the text.

Quite apparent here is that the sequences of steps described above are not referenced one to another but simply stand, without any correlation, adjacent one to another, wherein the focus is clearly on working out the mandatory topics.

How can this coexistence of unlinked sequences of steps in three separate systems be explained? On the one hand, this procedure reflects the curriculum work for the first generation of teaching texts for Islamic religious instruction. The emphasis is on constructing instructional content or, more precisely, determining what Islam actually is. It is only the substantive determination of the nature of Islam which justifies the new subject. The determination of what Islam is to be in schools and instruction takes place, by contrast, only in a second step.¹¹ Con-

⁸ Heidemarie Ballasch, p. 269.

⁹ Belief in Allah as the only deity, belief in Allah’s angels, Belief in Allah’s books including the Koran, belief in Allah’s prophets including Mohammed, belief in the hereafter, belief in divine providence. *cf.* Guidelines, p. 5.

¹⁰ I and my community, Islam ethics, stories of the Prophet, the Koran, fundamentals of Islam. *cf.* Guidelines, pp. 6 *f.*

¹¹ With this argumentation I am following the comments of Irka-Christin Mohr, who on 25 March 2006 presented her critical analysis of the guidelines at a meeting in Loccum

versely, the sequences of steps reflect the creation process for the guidelines. The preliminary work carried out by the round-table presumably bears the mark of the first two sets of systems¹² while the third set of systems bears the signature of the Ministry of Culture.

One may observe in general that the guidelines in Lower Saxony focus on the structure and determination of the instructional content. In comparison with the draft curriculum from North Rhine-Westphalia there is no explicit didactic substantiation or paths for accessing the content selected. The mandatory topics also list primarily a catalogue of subjects without any concrete statements as to objectives and/or directions. The way in which the instructional content is to be linked with the pupils' lives remains open and this is not explored didactically.

Given the lack of a system of didactics for Islamic religion instruction, the practice in the real classroom situation is an open-ended experimental field. Until such time as independent Islamic religion didactics have been developed the following applies in practical teaching: "The implementation of the guidelines is thus based on general didactic skills and didactic knowledge of Protestant or Catholic religious instruction as it relates to the subject at hand".¹³

In providing for scientific review of the experiment, Lower Saxony has created an instrument which will make clear to an interested public both the successes achieved and any as yet unsolved problems.

called to draw up "an interim balance sheet" on the academic experiment in Lower Saxony.

¹² The structure and elaboration of the six topic areas are oriented on the curriculum for Islamic religious instruction published in 1999 by the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. Compare in this regard the instructive analysis in the work by Irka-Christin Mohr, pp. 43 ff.

¹³ Heidemarie Ballasch, p. 270.

3. "Islamic tuition"¹⁴ in North Rhine-Westphalia

The states of Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia had in the 1980s already instituted on a broad scale "religious tuition" for Muslim pupils within the framework of instruction in their "heritage language" (*i.e.* the language spoken in the home). Teaching in Bavaria was in accordance with curricula prepared by the Turkish Ministry of Education while North Rhine-Westphalia worked out its own curriculum. Both of these states are now offering, in accordance with these concepts, Islamic tuition in German for Muslim pupils. In North Rhine-Westphalia this has been the case since the 1999/2000 school year, in Bavaria since the 2001/2002 year. With this concept of Islamic tuition both states have adopted a course of offering religious studies for which the state alone is responsible, this in the place of religious instruction [under the aegis of the religious communities]. Thus an offer is to be made for Moslem pupils until such time as the constitutional prerequisites for Islamic religious instruction have come into being. In the view of the state governments there is no partner in the Muslim community with which to achieve any kind of organised cooperation in line with Article 7.3 of the Constitution. The Muslim umbrella organisations in North Rhine-Westphalia see this quite differently and are appealing to the courts to acquire recognition as a religious community.

In North Rhine-Westphalia the content of instruction in the new subject is based on work carried out by curriculum commissions whose composition and methods have set new standards. In these commissions, chaired by a representative of the school administration, Turkish teachers, scholars of Islam and religion educators worked out drafts which were discussed exhaustively with Islamic congregations and associations. In the later course of the process contact was made, and concurrence

¹⁴ Since March 1, 2005, "Islamic tuition" has been renamed "Islamic studies" in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

achieved, with Islamic theological faculties, with the Office of Religious Affairs in Turkey and with the German representatives of the Muslim World Congress. One may say that the curriculum work to date – organised in teaching units¹⁵ – has achieved a degree of recognition within Islamic academic theology circles to which the drafts for Islamic religious instruction submitted by the large umbrella organisations¹⁶ can lay no claim.¹⁷ To this extent the term “religious studies”, as provided for in school legislation, is indeed formally correct. In terms of curriculum and didactics, however, the envisioned instruction adopts the principle of correlating the tradition of the faith with the real-world environment of Muslim pupils. Thus the point of view held in “mere” religious studies has clearly been exceeded.¹⁸

The Christian churches in North Rhine-Westphalia have expressed criticism of the new subject and have spoken out in favour of religious instruction as per Article 7.3 of the Constitution. Thus they concur with the opinions put forth by the Central Muslim Council and the Islamic Council. Both umbrella organisations have filed suit against the Ministry, petitioning for the introduction of Islamic religious instruction.

At first glance the academic experiment in North Rhine-Westphalia would appear to be a pragmatic attempt, under the conditions currently prevailing, to ensure an appropriate educational option for Muslim pupils, giving Islam a place in the school and thus being of great significance in regard to integration efforts. In the course of installing the new subject in the schools, however, demarcation from Christian religious instruction and, in particular, the non-involvement of the Islamic organisations and associa-

tions in the design and conduct of instruction have proven to be ever more problematic. Thus an interim review of the academic experiment says that, “Two matters – the question of the influence of the [Muslim] organisations and a clearly defined association of the subject with religious education in public schools – are in urgent need of settlement.”¹⁹

The pronouncement handed down by the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig on February 23, 2005, lent a new quality to the legal battle conducted by the two umbrella organisations – the Central Muslim Council and the Islamic Council – with the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, aiming to achieve recognition as a religious community. The court set aside the December 2, 2003, judgement of the Superior Administrative Court and returned the case for new hearings. Significant in the Federal Court’s substantiation is its determination that umbrella organisations can most surely be taken into consideration for classification as religious communities if they discharge the essential functions which characterise religious communities. A court will have to decide anew whether this definition applies to the Central Muslim Council and the Islamic Council.²⁰

The draft curriculum for Islamic religious studies, of July 2005

Last summer the State Institute for Schools published a new draft for Islamic religious studies as a school subject. The objective for this subject is defined as follows:

- Schooling in Islamic studies is not religious instruction as is understood by the established Christian churches. The course in Islamic studies informs pupils about Islam, drawing upon pupils’ and teachers’ Islamic faith, and thus contributes to the pupils’ forming personal identities.²¹

¹⁵ The State Institute for Schools and Continuing Education in Soest has published separately the results for the elementary school, grades 5 and 6, and for grades 7 to 10.

¹⁶ cf. the “Curriculum for Islamic religion teaching (primary school)” published by the Central Muslim Council (ZMD) in March 1999.

¹⁷ cf. Johannes Lähnemann, pp. 313 ff.

¹⁸ cf. Klaus Gebauer, pp. 49 ff.

¹⁹ Eckhart Gottwald / Dirk Chr. Siedler, p. 13.

²⁰ cf. Andreas Gorzewski, pp. 12 ff.

²¹ Draft Curriculum, Islamic studies in German in the Primary School, Grades 1 – 6, p. 6.

Just these two sentences make it clear that the draft is to continue the direction followed in previous curriculum development for the subject. At the formal level the character of the subject as Islamic studies is retained but any “impartial” conveyance of knowledge about Islam is excluded at the didactic level. At the same time the correlative approach is maintained in so far as the pupils are to achieve, in their classes, the ability to “put the basic traditions of the Koran and Sunnah in relation to their own experiences in their own environment and to the experiences of other people”.²²

The Koran, the Sunnah and the texts of the law schools are cited as the three major reference sources for the Islam religion. However, the contents of “Islamic studies” are not derived from the traditional materials. Instead, substantive content or topics become subjects for instruction only when they can be linked with a didactic question or perspective. With this fundamental didactic orientation, “real-world topics will be (worked through) in the context of a certain question or perspective which is also to be carefully selected and considered”.²³

The draft is attractive in the way in which it was successful in opening up “thematic units” that consider the perspectives of “everyday life in Germany” and the “fundamentals of Islam”, these being subdivided into the fields of “our surroundings in our personal experiences”, “obligations, worship and customs” and “religious knowledge”.

The guiding principles – following the “worlds of learning” principle and the determination of “thematic fields” – result in a multi-perspective consolidation in “thematic aspect fields”. Overall, the didactic profile applied to the curriculum is derived and substantiated in a persuasive fashion. In the plethora of these aspect fields there is little clarity as to which points of access to Islamic theology and the tradition of the faith result from the concrete content choices – e.g. the selection of the surahs, stories of the Prophet etc. At the same time,

²² Draft Curriculum, p. 10.

²³ Draft Curriculum, p. 18.

using the acronym WTN (words – terms – names) implies prejudicial decisions and these are neither disclosed nor substantiated by the authors. The Islam faith – the content of instruction – thus appears to be an apparently “objective” and immutable magnitude; the only decisions made are in regard to the didactics used to give access to Islam.²⁴

It is thus hardly to be expected that the Islamic associations see themselves represented in the new curriculum.

4. Islamic religious instruction in Berlin

In Berlin – deviating from the precepts expressed in Article 7.3 of the Constitution – there is a scheme for religious instruction which places the subject under the sole responsibility of religious or philosophical communities. Religious instruction is an elective subject which is a “matter of the churches and religious and philosophical communities” (Article 13 of Berlin’s School Law). Parents have to register their children for religious instruction and, once they have turned 14, the pupils themselves decide whether they wish to participate. The decisions on the principles to be taught, the curricula and the teaching materials are exclusively within the purview of those who offer the subjects and they alone are responsible for appointing teachers to give instruction.²⁵ At present religious and/or philosophical instruction is being provided by the Protestant and Catholic churches, the Jewish congregation (at one school location) and the Humanist Association, which offers classes in humanist “theory of living”. With the 2000/2001 school year a new “purveyor” appeared on Berlin’s “school relig-

²⁴ One has to admit that a reader not familiar with the subject would arrive at the same conclusion upon reading a Protestant or Catholic curriculum. The difference does nonetheless continue to exist: the theological content was not selected without the assent of the churches.

²⁵ For information on the history and current situation see Friedhelm Kraft, pp. 159 ff.

ions market”.²⁶ As the result of lengthy litigation and pursuant to the final decision of the Federal Administrative Court (on February 23, 2000) the Islamic Federation of Berlin²⁷ was afforded the privilege of giving Islamic religious instruction in public schools in Berlin.

This judgement triggered animated public discussion since the Islamic Federation, an organisation demonstrably sympathising with the “Islamische Gemeinschaft – Milli Görüs e.V.”,²⁸ was legitimised as a provider of religious instruction. Milli Görüs is a group which the Office for the Protection of the Constitution characterises nation-wide as being an extremist Islamist organisation.²⁹ That is why the Islamic Federation is also much disputed within Berlin’s Muslim community, as well. It remains to be noted that the recognition of the Islamic Federation as a religious community was effected only on the basis of school legislation specific to Berlin. An examination of a judicial definition of “religious community” as per Article 7.3 of the Constitution was not possible, this being due to the particular legal situation in Berlin.³⁰

The Islamic Federation has in the meantime expanded Islamic religious instruction to include 37 schools and in the 2004/2005 school year reached more than 4,000 pupils with its voluntary courses. Instruction is

²⁶ In addition, Alevi religious instruction is offered at a few schools and Buddhist instruction is provided at one school site.

²⁷ The Islamic Federation presents itself to the public as an independent, regional representative of all Muslims in Berlin. It was founded in 1980 as an umbrella organisation. The 26 member associations include in fact only Turkish-Islamic groups.

²⁸ The Islamic Federation has also defended itself in the courts against this claim. At the very least some persons are members of both organisations and this fact is no longer being contended by the Federation.

²⁹ cf. the study by Thomas Lemmen, published by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, pp. 40 ff.

³⁰ Consequently Berlin’s governing Senate, in the new version of the School Law (adopted on August 1, 2005) defined more precisely in Section 13, Paragraph 1, its understanding of a religious community.

given in German by the Federation’s own instructors on the basis of a curriculum – the “Temporary Framework Plan for Islamic Religious Instruction in the State of Berlin” (grades 1 to 4). The Federation had to submit the framework plan to the Berlin Senate’s Administration for examination. The objections of the school administration in regard to how instruction is to be presented were of no effect since, due to the legal situation in Berlin, the school administration may examine the curriculum only for conformity with the Constitution and may not intervene in the concept for the contents of the instruction.³¹

On the formulation and conceptualisation of the curriculum

The history of the draft curriculum mirrors the fundamental difficulties inherent to the course chosen for Berlin. The Islamic Federation first attempted to prepare a draft on its own accord but, once interim results were available, abandoned this course. In a second step it commissioned the Institute for Interreligious Pedagogy and Didactics (IPD) to draft a curriculum. The Islamic Federation was obviously not successful in joining Islamic theological perspectives with pedagogic and didactic needs.³² The draft was instead characterised by a compilation of Islamic materials and topics and thus corresponded, in respect of its structure, to classical curricula which – and not just for the subject of religion – were common in the 1950s. A positioning of Islamic religious instruction – in terms of didactics and curriculum – for use as instruction in Berlin’s schools and for Berlin’s children was not provided for.

With the selection of the institute in Cologne the Islamic Federation had turned to an in-

³¹ Criticised by the Senate’s School Administration was the fact that the educational objectives listed were, in character, only declarations of intent since they were not cast in didactic plans. In regard to the following see the excellent study prepared by Irka-Christin Mohr, pp. 123 ff.

³² The author participated in the assessment of the draft in the spring of 1999.

stitution that is also considered to be within the Milli Görüs network. The IPD staff at Cologne do, however, adhere to a concept of Islamic religious instruction which adopts the principle of correlation with the child's environment. At the centre is the development of "Koran-referenced didactics" that pursue the goal of establishing a relationship between the texts of the Koran and the children's own lives. But by selecting the IPD as its partner in these efforts, the Islamic Federation had manoeuvred itself into an inconsistent situation. On the one hand it had made use of the pedagogic orientation of the curriculum to attain public acceptance of its instruction. On the other hand the Federation's understanding of the Koran is not in alignment with the IPD's approach to interpretation.³³

As a consequence the curriculum promulgated by the Islamic Federation of Berlin is distinguished by the following characteristics:

As regards the guiding tenets for instruction, there is a focus on pedagogic objectives. Education in the interest of achieving "tolerance as a matter of course", stimulation for "personal decision-making processes", distancing itself from "any and all missionary character" are formulated as the pedagogic guidelines for instruction that is to be dialogue-driven and oriented on the experiences of Muslim pupils. An obvious feature in the curriculum is, however, that surahs from the Koran are cited throughout or reference is made to relevant points in the Koran. Comments on Koran-related didactics or indeed on Koran-related hermeneutics are not made. Thus the concrete manner in which the texts of the Koran are to be handled during instruction is left unaddressed; the intended reference to the children's environment is not evident. The Federation represents instead the view that the Koran texts selected can be understood

clearly and unequivocally on their own and that consequently no "interpretation" is required. What is found, instead of interpretation, is promulgation of an "immutable" body of knowledge and this is associated with the promulgation of the "proper" attitudes.

Since Berlin's school administration has no influence on the content of religious instruction – it cannot exercise oversight analogous to that for a "standard subject" – it remains unclear which pedagogic-theological standards actually apply to instruction and in particular which "interpretations" the children are in fact to assimilate. The instructors are chosen by the Islamic Federation and receive in-service training conducted internally by the Federation. The school authorities examine only the fitness of teachers (in regard to their allegiance to the Constitution) and proof of educational qualification.

5. Conclusions

With a view toward the models and paths described here, aiming to establish religious education for Muslim pupils in German schools, the following can be ascertained:

- It is only to a limited extent that the concrete curricula can be subsumed under the categories "religious studies" or "religious instruction". Instruction given by Muslim teachers and which is to have integrational and identity-building effects will always be more, in terms of didactics, than mere "studies".
- The view of the guidelines presented here shows that Islamic religious instruction makes necessary "religious and theological positioning" (Irka-Christin Mohr) for Muslims in Germany. Concentration on designing the content of instruction while neglecting didactic access can be interpreted as an attempt to effect this "positioning" and forms a characterising feature of the first-generation of guidelines.

³³ Cooperation between the Islamic Federation and the IPD was terminated shortly after the publication of the curriculum. Following an initial phase of cooperation, the Federation took control of training for its teachers of religion and for the preparation of teaching materials.

- In view of the decentralised structure of Islam, the question of Muslims' participation in the academic experiments and/or the subjects instructed in school continues to be the decisive challenge. Since no general solutions are in sight, it is possible only to embark on individual courses of action in the various states. A key role here is assumed by that association of Muslims in Germany which has the largest number of members – the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institution for Religion (DITIB). As a Turkish overseas organisation it enjoys a special position in comparison with the other umbrella organisations. Moreover, official statements are often characterised by a claim to sole authority for representing Muslims; cooperation with other Islamic associations is limited. Thus the course adopted in Lower Saxony could, in this spirit, also serve as a model for further cooperative efforts. Particularly the example in Berlin shows that the “power of definition” in regard to Islamic religious instruction may not be assigned to a single Islamic association.

- In Lower Saxony the Ministry of Culture has taken the initiative and has outlined a pragmatic course for Islamic religious instruction, and one with a clear mission statement.

The encouraging results of the academic experiment already show that transitional solutions are required in order to ensure Muslim pupils their “right to religion” in the schools. The question here is less one of how long these “transitional periods” might last. Far more important is laying the groundwork that will make Islamic religious instruction possible in future in compliance with Article 7.3 of the Constitution. The fact that Muslim associations are currently reorganising may be seen as a progressing institutionalisation of Islam in Germany. And in spite of this it continues to hold true that the question of Islamic religious instruction is primarily a question of school policies and less one of the politics of the various associations.

ANNEX 1: Structure of Lower Saxony's Framework Directives

Setting educational outcomes as part of Lower Saxony's Framework Directives

The directives state the following key objectives for Islamic religious studies:

- Looking at existential questions as to where we come from and where are we going and as to the meaning and purpose of human existence;
- In line with the pupils' age, looking at faith, written testimonies, traditions and customs as well as where the faith comes from and its effects in the course of its history;
- Looking at one's own religion.³⁴

The directives emphasize that:

" (...) Religious Islamic studies (are about) the encounter with and reflection on faith-related experience and faith-related practices; the classroom is not the place for practising one's faith."³⁵

In contrast, the syllabus drawn up by Central Muslim Council of Germany aims at instruction in faith. The study area "the Koran", for example, states the following aim: "The effects of the language of the Koran on people's emotions and their sub-conscience shall be used and promoted by using recitations from the original text in Arabic."³⁶

Instead of aiming at instruction Lower Saxony's directives aim at reflection: "In order to illustrate the effect of the language of the Koran on people's emotions and on community structures excerpts from the original text in Arabic may be used by way of example."³⁷

In addition, those responsible for setting the curriculum in Lower Saxony inserted a "negative outcome". It states explicitly what must be avoided: "It shall be ruled out that traditional forms of practising the faith be blindly taken on or imitated without reflection and that oral or written traditions be looked at without questioning."³⁸

As a method and a didactic principle to overcome such *blind acceptance of faith and imitation without reflection* the framework directives state a correlation according to which "faith and the practice of faith should be linked to the realities of life as pupils experience them so that both aspects may be explained and developed in that correlation"³⁹. This critical and productive correlation between religious traditions and the experience of people of today shall ensure that children are in a position to question traditional attitudes (including those of their parents).

The three systematic approaches of the framework plan

1. Systematic approach

The formulation of study areas is based on what is defined as the core of

³⁴ see *ibid.*, p. 4 *ff.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁶ Central Muslim Council of Germany (editor): Syllabus for Islamic religious tuition (primary schools), p.5.

³⁷ Lower Saxony's Ministry for Education (editor): Framework directives for the educational model "Islamic religious tuition", p. 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁹ Lower Saxony's Ministry for Education (editor): Framework directives for the educational model "Islamic religious tuition", p.4.

Islam, the *important statements of Muslim Faith*: the 6 *articles of faith* and their so-called *visible expression*, the 5 *pillars of Islam*. The 6 articles of faith are: the belief in the One God (*Allah*); the belief in His Angels; the belief in His Books, the belief in His Prophets and Messengers (including Mohammed), the belief in Judgement Day (and life after death) and the belief in God's Divine Decree. The 5 pillars are: witnessing (*Shahadah*), prayer (*Salat*), fasting (*Sawm*), charity (Zakah) and pilgrimage (*Hajj*).

The framework directives base their definition of Islam on these six articles and 5 pillars (6+5).

2. Systematic approach

Here the following 6 topics are introduced:

- My community and I
- Islamic ethics
- Stories of the prophets
- The prophet Mohammed
- The Koran
- Principles of Islam⁴⁰

These six topics are in turn subdivided into various sub-topics which are assigned to the 4 years of primary schooling by using table. The second systematic approach is aimed at fleshing out the first one: "The important statements of faith as well as their visible expressions and interpretations will be dealt with in the following six topics."⁴¹

The study areas of the 6+5 are, however, are only resumed under the 6th topic: *Principles of Islam*. This in fact means that the first and the second systematic approach only come together in the overlap of issues as part of the 6th topic.

3. Systematic approach

As part of a third approach the directives state 10 so-called compulsory themes. They are fleshed out in the main part of the document which is 36 pages long and are covered in pages 12 to 33. The following compulsory themes are dealt with in two pages each:

Allah

Allah's creation

The Koran

The prophet Mohammed

The prophets

Prayer

Fasting

Living together in the larger community

The Community of Muslims

*Encounter with other religions.*⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.*ff.*

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴² Ibid., p. 12.

Bibliography

Bade, Rolf/Windolph, Edeltraud: "Islamischer Religionsunterricht – ein niedersächsischer Schulversuch", in *SVBI* 12/2003.

Ballasch, Heidemarie: "Auf dem Weg zum Islamischen Religionsunterricht – der Schulversuch in Niedersachsen", in *Schulverwaltung NISH*, No. 10/2005.

Gebauer, Klaus: "Islamischer Religionsunterricht?", in *Pädagogik*, No. 10/98, pp. 49 ff.

Gorzewski, Andreas: "Mit einer Stimme sprechen. Islamische Verbände wollen als Religionsgemeinschaft anerkannt werden", in *zeitzeichen*, 11/2005, pp 12 ff.

Gottwald, Eckhardt / Siedler, Dirk Chr. (ed.): "Islamische Unterweisung" in deutscher Sprache. Eine erste Zwischenbilanz des Schulversuchs in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2001.

Kraft, Friedhelm: "Religionsunterricht in Berlin - der öffentliche Streit um das von den Kirchen vorgeschlagene Konzept der Fächergruppe", in **Doyé, Götz / Kessler, Hildrun (ed.):** *Konfessionslos und religiöse. Gemeindepädagogische Perspektiven*. Leipzig, 2002.

Lähnemann, Johannes: *Evangelische Religionspädagogik in interreligiöser Perspektive*. Göttingen, 1998.

Lehrplan-Entwurf Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in der Grundschule Klasse 1 – 4, Landesinstitut für Schule, dated July 7, 2005.

Lemmen, Thomas: *Islamische Vereine und Verbände in Deutschland*. Bonn, 2002.

Mohr, Irka-Christin: *Islamischer Religionsunterricht in Europa. Lehrtexte als Instrumente muslimischer Selbstverortung im Vergleich*. Bielefeld, 2005.

Rahmenrichtlinien für den Schulversuch "Islamischer Religionsunterricht", Ministry of Culture for Lower Saxony, May 2003.

Stock, Martin: *Islamunterricht: Religionskunde, Bekenntnisunterricht oder was sonst?* Münster, 2003.

Vorläufiger Rahmenplan für den islamischen Religionsunterricht im Lande Berlin (Klassenstufen 1 – 4). Islamic Federation of Berlin, April 2000.

Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD): *Lehrplan für den Islamischen Religionsunterricht (Grundschule)*, March 1999.