IN PURSUIT OF SUBJECT DIVERSITY: 
THE NEW VALUES EDUCATION/RELIGION COLLECTION

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The research library began to focus on sourcing values education and religion textbooks in 2012 to complement its social sciences collection. This was in response to demand from the academic community for textbooks on this socially relevant school subject and it underpins the wider research orientation of the Georg Eckert Institute. The new collection subsumes the subjects of religion, ethics and philosophy; the latter two being offered in Germany as alternatives to religious education. In the USA and in certain secular countries such as France religious education is not offered in state schools and so lessons in ethics or philosophy are given in their place.

In addition to procuring textbooks in these new subjects the research library also collects selected teaching materials and curricula. Bibles and song books approved by federal state governments are not included in this acquisition process and neither are philosophical texts. In order to secure and sustain the procurement of such texts the research library has established contacts with relevant publishing houses and retailers. In the first twelve months of the process 1,400 current textbooks and 500 curricula were procured by the library and added to the collection. Searches in the textbook catalogue TextbookCat (http://tbcat.edumeres.net/) can be differentiated according to textbook type using the Filter options “Religion”, “Ethics” and “Practical Philosophy”. Currently around 3,700 religion textbooks from over 80 different countries are available to researchers. The Curricula Workstation (http://curricula-workstation.edumeres.net/) provides access to individual subject curricula, many of which are available digitally and are therefore enabled for full text searches. Our aim with the area of values education/religion textbooks, as with those pertaining to social sciences, is for the collection to possess copies of all available textbooks issued in Germany and for it to contain as many historic examples as possible. The historic Jewish education materials procured through the “Innovation through Tradition” project are worthy of particular mention.

Corresponding academic literature complements the collection of textbooks and curricula and includes continuously updated journals from the field of values education/religion.

Values education/religion lessons are widely diversified and the subject has been accompanied, certainly in Germany, by protracted discussions. According to the principle of equal treatment all practising religions are permitted in Germany to develop religious education lesson plans; Islamic and Jewish religions are already being taught. Regulations regarding the status of religion, ethics or philosophy as standard, substitute or optional subjects vary from state to state.

The new collection is freely accessible and the majority of texts are available for loan. The broad spectrum of emphasis observed in the dissemination of religious knowledge, values and ideology is reflected in the collection, which is of particular importance in view of the ongoing debate surrounding religion and its role as a contributor to the construction of social identity.