PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION IN THE 21 st CENTURY 'WHEN YOUR SON ASKS YOU'…. HOW REMEMBRANCE CAN TEACH LIFE-SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Jewish-christian tradition is memory-tradition. Just from the beginning, people are confronted with the God of Abraham, Isaak and Jacob and with particular situations, which are worth remembering (Exodus, Ten Commandments). Because the Bible combines remembering and teaching („When your son"... (Dtn 6, 20)), religious education means memory-education. Like Israel in real Exile and Diaspora, young pupils and students suffer from „virtual Exile or Diaspora", when they are dwelling within their digital global village, and in „patchwork-families", often without real home-experience and without any sense of belonging. Suffering from such experiences of missed orientation and belonging, they feel – as discussions in schools and groups underline - unsatisfied and uncomfortable, and look for authentic coping-models. Therefore, the study emphasizes – based on narrations of elder people - on a particular religious education-approach, which facilitates life-satisfaction by memory-learning from other experiences. The focus of research is on the question, whether memory-learning, combined with religious contents, rituals and/or metaphoric, could encourage life-satisfaction, and whether there are significant differences between East (Latvia) and West (Germany).
Key words: *education, life-satisfaction, memory-learning, religiousness, remembrance.*

Introduction

When elder people talk about their childhood and socialization, they follow their own life-script and, thus, mix real remembered experiences with interpretations and quotations. Similar attitudes can be observed, when young pupils direct their life as a role-play. Because such life-script depends on the cultural background and life-world, the question, whether there are differences between East (Latvia) and West (Germany), and whether particular biographical strategies depend on age/generation or not, are core-topics of this study because of their educational implications: If there are general connections between religious socialization and later life-satisfaction by appropriate memory-strategies, young pupils can draw benefit from such results by developing analogue models and strategies. Therefore, the paper will neither discuss the relationship between religion and psychology, nor the influence of religious attitudes on life-satisfaction in general, or the influence of single images on life-satisfaction, but emphasizes on the core-function of different memory-attitudes as a link between transcendent experiences and life-satisfaction. Although such images seem constructed and experienced (Kunkel et al., 1999), they represent attitudes, which combine old religious traditions with modern secular needs, particular concerning different social and historical frameworks, such as German and Latvian.

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Problem of Research

Recent research underlines the strong relationship between positive religious images (loving God) and self-esteem (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Francis, Robbins & Gibson, 2001 et al.) and self-concept (Jolley& Taulbee, 1986);the refore, they suggest similar results concerning religious images and psychological life-satisfaction. Indeed, there is evidence concerning the relationship between religious images and different aspects of psychological life-satisfaction, which are characterized by Ryff (1989): contribution to purpose in life (Francis, 2013; Francis, Jewell, Robbins, 2010); empathy (Francis, 2007, Khajeh et al., 2014), personal adjustment (Tisdale et al., 1997), with self-worth and moral-values (Francis, Gibson & Robbins, 2001; Francis, 2001, Francis & Robbins, 2007), mental health (Francis, 2007). All these (selected) studies underline that the coping with God images is based on a (positive or negative) religious socialization and depends on the personality; thus they suggest further investigation, whether there are similar observation concerning life-satisfaction or not, and how religious education can draw benefit from such interdependencies by using particular religious oriented memory-attitudes. Religious metaphoric language reflects the person's religious knowledge in a symbolic and emotional way as a kind of "implicit personal religion" (*Argyle,* 2000). Such experiences are the main content of religious memories and influence personal life-satisfaction and self-acceptance within a dynamic process (Khumalo, 2010), and build a complex, and integrated concept encompassing various facets (Wissing & Temane, 2008). As a dynamic process, memorizing and coping include subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as health-related behaviours (Khumalo, 2010). Following the Ryff Scales (Ryff, 1989), psychological life-satisfaction consists of the following facets: self-acceptance, establishment of quality ties to others, a sense of autonomy in thought and action, ability to manage complex environments, ability to suit personal needs and values, pursuit of meaningful goals, and a sense of purpose in life (Ryff, 1989). Attached is empathy as an expression of personal life-satisfaction, and self-esteem as a kind of self-acceptance. As a kind of intrinsic religion, it is separated from „extrinsic", virtue-oriented models of hedonistic life-satisfaction (Peterson & Seligmann, 2004). Therefore, it should be evaluated, whether such internal symbolic religious constructions, developed under different circumstances, make any significant contribution to the dynamic process of life-satisfaction.

Focus of Research

Because religious images and life-satisfaction are both influenced by child experiences (Roberts, 1989), memorizing such experiences becomes crucial, particular for educational purposes and concepts. Religious images are regularly combined with particular symbols and stereotypes, such as home, belonging, mutual understanding, acceptance in family, nature (garden) etc. Religious education is an opportunity to facilitate such experiences of trust in oneself, in others, and in life. Depending on them, there are three scenarios and three coping strategies concerning the contribution of religious images and memories to psychological life-satisfaction (Lawrence, 1997): Children, who missed acceptance and basic trust, develop a religious image, which is mostly characterized by distance and controlling, from which they suffer as "parent-symbols"; such image as a core-category influences their memories, which become illustrations of these experiences. In their adult interpretation of them, their life-satisfaction does not depend on any God (images), but on their own achievement (Seegobin et al., 2007); thus, disappointments and failure, become dramatic crisis. Children, who experienced 'conditionalized' love ("good child"-model), develop a self-image that facilitates categories of authority and obedience, which encourage role-playing, and prevent self-esteem (Francis, 2007). Therefore, only children, who experienced authentic love and basic trust, are able to integrate critique, rules and conflicts within this framework, because they developed social attitudes from their socialization (Piazza & Glock, 1979, p. 91). In their memories and interpretation

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– particular facilitated by religious education - religious oriented symbols represent this basic trust, and, therefore, are core-fundamentals of their (spiritual) life-satisfaction (Francis, 2007). These general considerations should be evaluated by interviews (closed and open questions) with Germans and Latvians of advanced age, who remember their child-experiences; the purpose of the evaluation, therefore, emphasizes on educational approaches and strategies, which encourage young students and pupils to cope successfully and satisfied with analogue experiences.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

The research is based on the aspect of identity-building by remembering (Burge, 2003), and by religious rituals, communication and transmission of religious knowledge (Barrett, 2000). Concerning the aspect of collective memory in culture as a crucial element of cultural identity and remembrance (Assmann, Jan & Czaplicka, 1995); it also follows Olick (1999) and others, who distinguish between individualist (neurological and cognitive), and collectivist (social and cultural) understandings of collective memory, and suggest a holistic strategy of multidimensional and interdisciplinary rapprochement for research by evaluating symbol systems, language, narrative, and dialogue within social frameworks. Although not explicitly emphasized, the framework of the research is built up by the Second World war, situated within the totalitarian regimes of Nazism and Stalinism, exemplified by Holocaust and Gulag (Bier &Allinder (1980)); the research also evaluates the strategies of encompassing historical situation by collective memory (Hirst & Maniert, 2008). One core-element in this transmission-process is the use of cultural myths and folk-tales (Norenzajan et al., 2006). The research emphasizes on the consistency of the message with the religious beliefs of the subject as a function of memory (Pargament & DeRosa, 1985), as well as on the political responsibility of memory (Assmann, Aleida, 2011), concerning both: communicative and cultural memory (Assmann, 2008) and their social (Halbwachs, 1950) and cultural conditions and circumstances (Erll, 2011), exemplified by the "retrospective anticipation" (Welzer, 2008).Although mood and outlook on life can influence the perception of life satisfaction remembering child experiences, connected with the individual's personal values seems to be more of influence on both religiosity and life satisfaction, as demonstrated by churchgoers and people who pray frequently (Cloninger, 2007). The current research intends to confirm these hints by using a multidimensional approach.

Instruments and Procedure

Quantitative (ANOVA) and qualitative (Grounded Theory) instruments should evaluate how the interdependencies between religiosity, memory, and life satisfaction can be described in educational terms and become useful for educational purposes. Concerning the current study, the difference between individualistic cultures, such as Germany, and their direct attention to inner states and feelings (such as positive or negative affects), and collectivist cultures, such as Latvia, with their attention directed to outer sources (social norms, duties, patriotism) is crucial, because it also influences family and social life by religious oriented discourse-attitudes.

Sample of Research

Evaluating interviews with elder people (about 70 – 90 years old) from Germany (Muenster) and Latvia (Liepaja and Riga), concerning common experiences and differences underline should evaluate whether religious oriented memories, expressed by narrations, symbols and rituals, influence life-satisfaction.

Data Analysis

Open and closed questions concerning religious and historical experiences were mixed and evaluated both ways, statistically and qualitative (concerning categories). Although the sample is very small, the results allow drawing conclusions for educational purposes.

Results of Research

The statistical results (ANOVA) underline that there are core-elements, which facilitate life satisfaction by remembering and combining these memories or interpreting them with religious metaphoric as life- and educational categories (found by Grounded Theory): Elements concerning the framework or life-world, such as nature, language, and homeland, and elements concerning the human environment, such as parents, faith, childhood, and the political situation in childhood (Nazi and/or Soviet-time).
In both groups Latvians (N=8) do more emphasize on these core-elements than Germans (N=14):

First Group (1=important – 2=uncertain – 3=not important):
Nature (Germans: M=2.36, SD=0.79; Latvians M=1.00, SD=0.00; Total M=1.86)
Language (Germans: M=2.21, SD=0.70; Latvians M=1.25, SD=0.46; Total M=1.86)
Homeland (Germans: M=1.93, SD=0.22; Latvians M=1.00, SD=0.00; Total M=1.59)

Second Group (1=important – 2=uncertain – 3=not important):
Parents (Germans: M=2.00, SD=1.41; Latvians M=1.50, SD=0.70; Total M=1.82)
Childhood (Germans: M=1.43, SD=0.65; Latvians M=1.25, SD=0.46, Total M=1.36)
Faith (Germans: M=2.29, SD=0.57; Latvians M=1.38, SD=0.52; Total M=1.95)
Nazi-/Soviet regime (Germans: M=2.46 SD=0.66; Latvians M=1.38, SD=0.74; Total M=2.05)

The qualitative results confirm these answers. All respondents Germans and Latvians changed their homes several times (up to 10 times); therefore, home is a core-category. Only a few of them have passed university-exams, seven visited primary school; therefore, culture as folk-culture and family are crucial. All attended Lutheran and Roman-catholic churches; therefore, they emphasize on faith.

All participants agree that the years after 1945 had been an extraordinary challenge for them – some Germans and some Latvians, because they became refugees, others, because they suffered from allied (German) or Soviet occupation (Latvian). All of them had to cope with re-edification of destroyed houses, enterprises, relationships. They had to fear Russian soldiers, had to escape danger of life, suffering from hunger and impatience, from the loss of relatives and friends, from belongings and unreachable expectations. They often felt as strangers, because of Eastern origin or of weddings with the opposite confession. Nevertheless, they did not lose their faith but got power of hope by remembering past crises, by peer-groups, particularly, church groups, and by family-encounter. Particular, the Latvian answers emphasized on the core-function of parents for religious power; they also emphasize on the core-function of language and tradition for coping with the lost homeland, which became a religious-like symbol for belonging and paradise. Most of the Germans, on the other hand, tried to build up a new home in Western Germany and concentrated on this challenge. They tried a career by visiting school after work in order to study later at university. All Germans – and also the Latvian refugees - participated – more or less – at the Black marked where everything could be get in exchange for cigarettes; there also were curious about forbidden books and about films with political tendency, which they should visit. Most of them missed their fathers, who have been caught in Allied or Soviet prisons; thus family- encounters were a great pleasure for all of them. The bombardment in the German towns was terrible and terrifying. All remembered hills

of stones from former houses. Although, there were no contacts between German and Non-German refugees, a woman remembered the evacuation of cities for the Displaced Persons from Eastern Europe as new inhabitants, and some attacks of former forced labourers upon German cottages. Often they also get into conflict with the landlords. Everyone had to improvise his life by fabricating bicycles and other equipment and particularly during Christmas time in family, and concerning food. Children had to help in autumn in the harvest and in the fight against dangerous animals; thus living in nature for them was an adventure; they suffered from lost home, but kept in contact virtually by traditional food and rituals. They all agree that housing was uncomfortable.

Similar narrations were told by the Latvian respondents; one was deported to Siberia, others came from a mixed German-Latvian family, most suffered from difficult marriages/relationships, but all agree that remembering childhood and remembering the belonging to a (lost) homeland, together with tradition (festivals, rituals, narrations) encouraged them, sharing a collective memory and collective stereotypes, to hope for a new life in a free Latvia and kept them satisfied even with worst challenges of life. Similar to German answers, they all confirm that family-encounters and socialization were core-elements of their coping strategies and facilitate – together with peer-groups and common language and rituals self-acceptance, self-esteem and, thus,life-satisfaction.

Discussion

Religious people often underline that spirituality provides a perspective that allows them to find meaning and hope in every aspect of life, including its inevitable suffering and challenges. They agree that this facilitates being satisfied in a realistic way with life by growing in awareness of what is good and meaningful in their life and by being able to adapt with serenity. Such awareness – crucial for life-satisfaction, depends on the strategy how to remember experiences and how to interpret them. The results of this study confirm these general observations by demonstrating the value of faith, family, trustful childhood, building one's home, culture and language for coping with conflicting environments, such as Communism, and destructions. They underline that concerning self-esteem and self-actualization, meaning and satisfaction by learning coherent perspectives on life by balancing between individual and collective memories, is crucial. Such collective remembrance is – particular as memory-culture - combined with spirituality as the search for something beyond human existence and which connects individuals with the transcendent world and with all of life as the recognition of human contentedness with all life (Cloninger, 2007). For religious educational purposes, such observations, confirmed by the results of this study, suggest learning from other cultures, and becoming aware of religious-oriented categories in life: To consider nature as a organism, filled with memories and emotions, to consider language as a part of one's culture, to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism, and between child-like and childish, to consider oneself as part of a tradition, faith as a holistic part of this tradition, and not only as a confession, and to decode, re- and deconstruct political stereotypes. Religious education can facilitate such attitudes by providing appropriate narrations, symbols, stereotypes, and rituals. Thus, common and different circumstances, experiences and memories of German and Latvian people of advanced age underline the value of early childhood memories of basic trust, belonging and self-acceptance for later life, and, therefore, invite young pupils and students to draw benefit from them by evaluating analogue experiences in their own life and in religious narrations. Thus, these results facilitate opportunities for further research, which has already begun, particular concerning further comparisons between nations and/or generations.

Conclusions

Remembered religious oriented images within child-experiences facilitate (spiritual) life-satisfaction. Therefore, appropriate research concerning such topics should integrate cultural, religious and social sciences, in order to become aware of their complexity. Therefore, the current study contextualizes memories and interpretations in their religious, historical and educational context; therefore, it facilitates transferring such experiences (of elder and foreign people) into analogue contexts (of young students) by memory-learning and other educational strategies, such as: coping with stereotypes, encoding and decoding experiences, re- and deconstructing narrations symbols and rituals, empathy-training, changing perspectives, and others.

The results of this short study, thus, suggest a new – or renewed – awareness of religious memories and internal images and of their value for life-satisfaction, facilitated by educational actions. They also invite to further research on the core-function of basic-trust, of narrations, family- and social life-worlds and environments, peer-groups, folktales, stereotypes and rituals as elements of a memory-culture. They also suggest to distinguish between content and process of memory, and to evaluate the integration of memory, culture and mental abilities into such process of cultural identity and enculturation. Therefore, evaluating the emotional, cognitive, and practical influence of experiences of individuals and groups explains the value of experience-based religiosity, and facilitates opportunities for appropriate educational practice: Following the biblical tradition, students of religious education can find life-satisfaction by learning from own and other past experiences in an inter-generational, interdisciplinary, intercultural and holistic way.

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