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# Luhmann's Theory of Education

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Society is the social system, which includes all social operations and excludes all others. The system is conclusive in the field of its own operations. This means that it reproduces its own operations exclusively within the network and throughout the network of its own operations and it limits itself from the environment of other systems. The operations which reproduce the social system of society (i.e. from their own production reproduced) are communication. The system of the modern society is characterized through functional differentiation. This means that it consists primarily of subsystems through functions. The educational system is one of these functional systems. It works in an internal environment of society, its other functions must be observed through other functional systems, which enable the educational system and their functions. All of these systems, which determine society and the functional systems of society, can be observed through their own operations and are determinate with self-reference (Ger. Selbstreferenz). The system is, due to these reasons, not transparent for itself. It operates in a space of self-produced uncertainty (Ger. Ungewissheit).

As there are too many possibilities in the social system, the educational system react through self-organisation on the operative and semantic levels of the system. This self-organisation produces a micro-diversity of different sorts in educational- and –pedagogical situations.

## Education and society

If we assume that society consists of different people (human beings), education becomes a thing of substance (Ger. Substanz). What could be more im-

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<sup>1</sup> Most ideas in this section are taken from Niklas Luhmann book: *Das Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2002.

portant to think about than education, that a person can achieve the forms and the ways of behaving that enables social co-existence. (Jaeger, 1934) In this way, philosophy in its practical dimension became the sophisticatedly concurred concept for not only the education of aristocracy, but also for education of other social strata (classes). The social-structural changes in the history of the modern societies and their evolution have not yet had any immediate or urgent consequences nor have they changed the semantics of the relationships between the modern concept of person, society and education. There have been many renaissances in the history of modern societies.

The normative idea of *civilita* referred very clearly to the aristocracy, although in the context of education (not in the context of the law) the quality of morality was more important than the social position. In the 18th Century, old-European humanism was exchanged for neo-humanism. The latter was abstracted from all social stratifications and pressed itself onto “subjects“ (Ger. Subjekte). Following this, there was a change from the concept of (natural) perfection to the concept of education (Ger. Bildung).

### **The Concept of the modern subject (Ger. Subjekt)**

This question was established with the French Revolution and was very soon recognised as the question of commercialisation of agriculture and industrialisation of entrepreneurship. Recognition and respect for the differences between individuals and their rights to have their own life-goals, was followed by the changes in the concepts of education, while the traditional societies lost their predominant role. The tasks (role) of education could be achieved from that time on, only through the educational system. (Luhmann, 2002)

The educational system was established to be by-and-large autonomous and was founded on the principles of “self-organisation“. From that time on, we could observe the educational system as one of the pedagogical option through the conservative/progressive schema, education being concerned with the structural compatibility of the person (human being) and society or education trying to achieve its own goals in the sense of political humanism.

The problem of the definition of the modern man as a subject (Ger. Subjekt) derives from two different but connected deficiencies: 1) in mistakes made by interdisciplinary conducted theories and 2) the fact all this knowledge does not mean that we could predict the human behaviour, moreover that it must based on the principle of the unpredictability of human behaviour.

Firstly, a rough orientation could be possible by introducing two systems-theoretical concepts: the concept of operative conclusion and the con-

cept of structural linkage. The operative conclusion means the same as auto-poetic reproduction. The systems, which are established on this level of evolution, can be reproduced only from their own production. They cannot import any undigested part from the environment. All that fulfils and repeatedly refers to itself in the recursive process of its reproduction, as an element is the product of the system itself. This is valid for the biochemical reproduction of cells (and this was the starting point for Maturana's definition of life as auto-poesies) but also for the more complex systems such as the central nervous system or the immune system. In addition, the system of consciousness have to be characterised more as operatively conclusive, than as auto-poetic, begging the questions of how can we stimulate our own consciousness differently with the already achieved states of the mind? The differentiation of system building – from cells to the brains, from systems of consciousness to communication systems - is the result of evolutionarily successful modes of operation.

Also structures of auto-poetic systems<sup>2</sup> could be built and rebuilt, remembered and forgotten, only through a system's own operations. If there are not any imported elements, there are not also any imported structures. Moreover, the actualisation of structures is possible only through operations (elements). With regards to the classical difference of constants and variables, attributes entered now display the difference between auto-poetic operation- and structure-building. Last but not least, the consciousness is itself an extraordinary robust form of auto-poetic operation.

We should not be lost in particularities of this kind of theorizing, but go back to our starting-point. The question was how we can conceptualise education, which means education for human beings. We could say that society is made up of human beings, which could mean that all micro-physically operations have to be understood as organisms of social operations. We could use microphysical, bio-chemical or neuro-physiological determinisms to explain how human beings have to be treated in society, for example as an object of education. Furthermore, each theory of society and each theory of education could be understood as constitutive un-knowledge; in other words, each theory of education has to be understood in the concept of the loss of information. When we are speaking about the terminology of epistemological reflection, we mean that knowledge is based on the un-knowledge. The systems-theoretical analysis shows that all relationships between systems are built in this way. Structural linkages stay latent for these reasons.

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2 The term "autopoiesis" has been invented to define life. Its origin is clearly biological. Its extension to other fields has been discussed, but rather unsuccessfully and on the wrong premises. (See more precisely in: R. Felix Geyer, J. van der Zouwen: *Sociocybernetic paradoxes: observation, control and evolution of self-steering systems*. Sage publications, London, 1986: 172-193).

When we are comparing this concept with the traditional notion of the human being, it becomes apparent that the “non-material” components like “soul” or “spirit” have to be withdrawn. So when we are posing the question “what is the human being?”, the answer has to be: the highly complex system, which reproduces the differences.

From this point on, Luhmann speaks about the human being as the person. The form, which enables the seeing of the link that allows social communication and system dynamics of each man, is called the “person”. This concept is defined by the difference, which is grounded in the empirical conception of man as a creature. It is used as a form that allows marking the human being in a way that represents everything that is observable within an empirical reality. Man thus is the second unmarked side of the form “person”.

The ability to distinguish between the empirically given human being and the person cannot come solely from the necessity to reduce complexity. The identification of the person derives more from the requirements of communications, from the specific achievements of the social communication system. As society operates auto-poetic closed systems as well, which must be based on the elements and structures that reproduce themselves through their own products. Persons are the conditions for establishing communications, addresses, points of inclusions, often to clarify ambiguities occurring in the course of communication.

In this sense, a person can be described as the “intrinsic value” of the communication system of a society. They are constructs generated from operations driven by the self-repetition of the communication system of a society. People emerge as by-products in the course of communication because we need to know who is responsible for participating in the communication and whom we should contact with questions or requests in the form of statements or criticisms. It is necessary to know who is affected and who meets the expressed opinion.

This highly abstract theory of a person’s self-worth (as opposed to the people) will be explained through three aspects: 1. in terms of the catalytic function of the double contingency, 2. in terms of urgency that the person is presumed to have their own thinking and 3. in the way that the person is perceived as a motivational scheme, which makes requests and offers to exchange information.

1. Double contingency is a concept, which was introduced in sociology by Talcott Parsons.<sup>3</sup> It is not irrelevant to mention that Robert Sears introduced the social-psychological origins of the concept.<sup>4</sup> Primarily,

3 Compare with Talcott Parsons/Edward A. Shils (1951) *Toward a General Theory of Action*, Cambridge Mass., 16

4 Robert Sears, *Survey of Objective Studies of Psychoanalytic Concepts*. New York: Social Science Research Council, 1943.

it describes a circular dependency: In social systems, each participant has to take into consideration the fact that others can always be handled differently.

2. All communication must be assumed to take place through an exchange of thought. It must be assumed that the words and language in which communication is carried out are known to participants and are used reasonably and understandably. Also other communication shall take place in stable contexts of perception. It is clear, that in the tradition of the concept of the person, it has been defined as independent thought. People are thus social constructs with the ability to think and therefore communication can take place as evident processes to all participants.

3. A similar complication could be found when speaking about motives. Even very sophisticated psychological theory is difficult to comprehend and identify the motives as causes for certain behaviour. The motive then is not the cause, but the internal basis for action. Motives are produced in the communication for communication. People are motivated to act, to have their own thinking and, finally, they tend to engage in the circular relationship of double contingency, engage in the construction of the person, who is connected in on-going communication and reproduce themselves daily in every new situation and validate themselves. People are born but are then formed through socialization and education.

Neo-Humanist tradition is the re-formulation of the difference between human beings and the person, with the introduction of the concept of subject (Ger. *Der Subjekt*). Only the human being is an entity that places itself and all others on the same ground. The empirical analysis of the modern human condition only shows that this concept has collapsed. Today we can no longer accept the thesis that all people are "entities" (Ger. *Wesen*), people are recognized in the theory such as auto-poetics, operational conclusiveness, structural linkage, self-produced uncertainty, where the theoretical richness derives from a different determination of a human being on one hand and on the other hand from the characteristics of humans (their cells, their brains, their consciousness, etc.).

### **The construction of the modern systems theory of education**

In the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, this historical situation was not so clear. The French Revolution was leading to the "ideologicalisation" of politics. The autonomy brought with itself the structural under-determination of its own systems and was for this reason very weak. Only schools and

universities were differentiated in terms of organisation from the state, especially in Germany. A historical situation was established there, the complex semantic Mind/culture/enculturation, where the under-privilege classes were not excluded from educational processes any more. Today, only after the critical analyses done by Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>5</sup> can education be seen as a form of reproduction of the social classes and the class conditioned differences. From this point on, it could be concluded that the modern educational system reproduces the social differences and for this reason it is grounded in the process of its own selections.

The theory of subject changed most dramatically in Immanuel Kant's philosophy, how to find the transcendental foundation of the conditions of possibilities. Already Leibniz was trying to solve the problem of compossibility/incompossibility.<sup>6</sup> If we try theorising about the ontological status of possibility, we have to do this with the cybernetic systems theory (Luhmann, 2002: 80), where we have to ask ourselves about the conditions of the possibility. This means, that conditioning works only then, when there could be a postulation about the necessary condition (Ger. *notwendiger Bedingung*). With this idea of non-conclusive (opened) education of a child, education defines its own playground. The modern notion of educational system emerges.

The human being is non-conclusive. In a very long period of human thought, the fact that the human being was distinguished from the animal was underlined. From this point on, it was not clear enough as to why and for what purpose should the human being be educated. This creates the questions: what should the individual be? Which circumstances that differ from the others are important for making an individual? Where does our hope that the individual will be prepared to be educated come from?

Besides this, the question about the social function of education has been opened. The answer was very easy: to make a good man. However, in the modern society, we cannot define the human in the traditional concepts. Today, the question about man and mankind has become very important in more complex ways. The question about what is man and what is society has

5 Compare with Pierre Bourdieu, *Las distinction: Critique sociale de judgement de gout*, Paris, 1979 and Pierre Bourdieu/Jean Claude Passeron, *La reproduction: Elements pour une theorie du systeme d'enseignement*, Paris, 1970

6 Compossibility is a philosophical concept from Leibniz. According to Leibniz a complete individual thing (for example a person) is characterized by all its properties and these determine its relations with other individuals. The existence of one individual may contradict the existence of another. A possible world is made up of individuals that are compossible — that is, individuals that can exist together. Possible worlds exist as possibilities in the mind of God. One world among them is realised as the actual world and this is the most perfect one. Koinstinen, Olli and Arto Repo. 'Compossibility and Being in the Same World in Leibniz's Metaphysics'. *Studia Leibnitiana* 31 (1999): 196-214.

become very real. The answer is frequently very trivial in that socialisation and education has to be in the function of a society and in the function of the upbringing of a particular personality in the same time. For this reason we have to differentiate the concept of man and society very clear and the arena for investigation has to be opened to discover the social functions of education.

This situation leads us to the task of having to elaborate the empirical concept of human beings, where the question could be asked, how is education possible at all. One hundred years ago, an emphatic concept of individual existed, which was founded between some kind of social security net and radical social change. The attributes of this individual were: competence for rational decision making; spirit (Ger. Geist) in the sense of being able to be acculturated; driven with the possibility of being educated; competence for self-determination with determinations for actions and well-being taken by the ego (Ger. Ich), this is different from all others. This is the difference between the rationality of the decisions, which today tilt more and more to the situation, where individual preferences are the starting point for any social action, where the instability of time and social interdependency should be considered in every day practice of the individuals.

Modern education is possible only through the complex educational system. This system could be described in the terms of the concept of potentiality (for example: thinking), but this potentiality is not completely on disposal, moreover it is possible only when it is on disposal through its own conditioning. It is possible to describe this also through the difference between inhibition/disinhibition (Gierer, 1985). The system itself created the potentiality, which actualisation will be questioned. However, there is the possibility to build the system where the need for energy is very low if the causes for the system exist. The possibility is dependent on the situation and the type of reaction.

This systems-theoretical concept could be translated in the schema: medium/form. With the help of this schema, the system could externalize the highly complex internal relationships of conditioning. Through this procedure, we ensure "the objectivity" of the internal achievements, which could then be selected under the given possibilities, where the individual could select one or another move – as it could seen a game of Chess, where in playing Chess, for example, a definite move will have to be played in a situation where the position is self-produced. This seems to be the space of different possibilities, which are limited with the already achieved position in the arena, where the player has to decided, which will be the next move; within society it is created, within the game, it is played. (Luhmann, 2002: 80.)

The educational system cannot educate itself, in the same way that a light cannot set fire to itself. For all independent operations, this is out of

reach – which is a characteristic of all self-referential, auto-poetic systems. The economy cannot be paid by its own services and the legal system cannot be developed from the laws themselves. The educational system cannot be educated as good or bad, and as a result of this, it collapses. In other words, the educational system, we are dealing with, is facing with irresolvable non-determination with its operations. With regards to the notion of man reasoned pedagogical operations, there is an unavoidable uncertainty with education, visible in the light of successes and failures. Also there is a real possibility for the unity of educational systems already because the educational system differs from its environment and thus the internal system is based on the distinction between self-reference and the foreign-reference (ger. *Fremdreferenz*).

These types of self-descriptions are directed to the high ideas, which have inspired the educational system. It goes for the meaning and necessity of education, the responsibility for the development of the progeny, for the individual and social necessity of education. This does not change even when education refers to the political-ideological ideas such as “emancipation” or “equality of opportunities”. It is not a problem of the management of the classes, it is not a problem how to maintain discipline and avoid disruptions in the classroom. The importance of these problems may be first realised in practice. These partialities, which come from subject specific self-education literature and research reports are based on a “practice” as the foundation of education, are not sufficient to establish the teaching profession. The concept of “practice” is in this connection formally empty and does not belong to any scheme for solving future problems. It may only help us to see that self-descriptions have little substance, and that in the reality of interaction, teaching depends on certain other factors.

As mentioned before, the old-European tradition stressed the concept of nature when speaking on the question of education. The concept of nature was raised and suggested that it strives for its own perfection. In this way, the teachers find their place in the philosophy of nature. In this sense, also the continuous limitations of the society can be seen. Education cannot make the noble from the peasant child or vice versa. This also meant that for nobility, there were valid different forms of re-education of their own nature and different forms of imperfection, than for ordinary people. The more it has been insisted on the virtues, the clearer it was within such a philosophy of nature, that everyone can be born in the wrong social class. However, this could not be corrected by education, but through political action, but even this has not been possible in the first generation.

The problem of natural education primarily appears for the upper classes of the population. Only they have to pay particular attention to rais-



ing their children. For them it was to be feared that their children would be raised to be rough people, and consequently “sono stimati fuori della natura.” Education is just the device to help nature and it cannot replace it. Civiltà is itself an example of successful nature, the perfection of nature, but without education it has no chance. Accordingly, it is necessary make sure in social life, that civility is considered as natural and not artificially learned behaviour.

Through all the latent potential of education to saturate the social order and transform it, the concept of natural education is located within an established order. It is Evident that the agents of the new science are not in the position to offer a new model for educating the upper strata of the population. Changes cannot be anchored with the new construction of the hierarchical social order, neither with the construction of the new, science-based upper strata, but it can be anchored with the changes in the very principle of social inclusion. In the “national education” of the second half of the 18th century it appeared that there no longer exists a basis to excluded people from education due to their nature (= birth). It became clear that the educational system has another task that it should ask itself about inclusion and exclusion.

Education is in the psychological (Ger. geisteswissenschaftlichen) tradition treated as emancipation, which results in freedom. Furthermore, education is based on the assumption of “denial”, in the possibility that individuals have to experience culture as something internal. The relationship between the individual and culture has changed during the second half of 20th century. Culture has been often described as “symbolic violence”, which means that it was not a mere negotiation. Sooner or later, it was necessary to confront this violence: a distinction had to be made, what is acceptable and what is not.

Even if we rely on the canonical legitimacy of education, we have to maintain pedagogical considerations for the education of the individual. It is not about education for itself but education due to need. This also implies emancipation and freedom. In such an understanding of the subject, there remains an unseen social dimension. It is assumed only that with emancipation could the overall situation of humanity be improved, to enable human to become more humane. However, this begs the question, an improvement from what!

Emancipation for one is uncertainty for another. As soon as the sum of all features of the subject comes out and considering the social dimension as well, we are faced with all the ambivalence of “bourgeois” liberation program. Within this, there is no place for power or violence. However, there is the other side of freedom, which refers to the justification of its use and

means that people cannot know how it will be used first by others. So when we look at society, we need to look at its main functional systems, such as the operationally closed, self-referential systems, which means, systems with self-produced uncertainty. This atmosphere must lead pedagogy to the idea of freedom; its semantic code should be understood that there is no emancipation without uncertainty. This ambivalence should not be underestimated, because it supports the general societal opinion and climate of ignorance, uncertainty and risk.

Many educators have felt threatened because of the performers of a system-theoretical analysis and have started to look at this theory from the position of defensive reactions. These discussions has found themselves trapped in a blind street, because it has become unclear about what goes into this dispute and if there exists any possibility to solve the dispute or does it simply apply to different descriptions of the same object of research.

### Conclusions

In the end, we would like to oppose some aspects of these issues, in order to clarify sociological (and thus social-theoretical) treatment of the educational system and in this way also the efforts from reflecting upon the sense of upbringing and education in the society.

This clarification applies not only for critical analysis, as it has long been accused of sociological obsession with the criticism of society, we would also like to revoke the concept of pedagogy and replace it with other concepts. The theory of society that wants to fully define its subject area cannot let go of foundational ideas of education completely, those that concern other academic discipline (the same applies to the economy, law, the arts, etc.). Society is at least primarily the condition of reproduction of beliefs through education and thus always also believes in the ability for improvement of the already existing practice of education. It opens up the possibilities and therefore we invest our energies and motivations. In so far as it is a theory about society ambitious in terms of theoretical requirements and not only from this or another ideological position, it must insist on clear definitions and conceptual consistency, which have not merely arisen from various opinions, but have come from the separate societal sectors. However, this does not mean that this theory may undermine different society's opinions (such as trade unions, theologians, developers, educators) and keep the truth only for itself. The truth about society and education, however, may be presented in the form of complex relationships, so as to carry on with the re-description of society and education. The sense of this concept lies in the fact that we are dealing with something already described, not something that is about to describe. The concept of re-description cannot be understood with-

in a traditional logical-ontological metaphysical idea. Under this concept, we understand only "the be" (Ger. Sein), so, the notion of re-description can be understood only as a corrective to the already existing theory of society.

There is the great need to develop also the theory of reflexivity. If the theory of pedagogy will progress in the direction to develop the theory of reflexivity for the purpose of the educational system, i.e. that there will absolutely identify with the objectives and institutions for the purpose of the system, then these bodies will not be considered indifferently. This does not preclude critical observations to science of pedagogy. On the contrary: the critics do in fact show commitment. However pedagogy cannot proceed with its work if it is assumed that education should be understood as pointless or seemingly hopeless, or that it cannot be scientifically seen. So we need to understand the concept of reflexivity in the context of sociology of knowledge. Sociology knows that such a theory of reflexivity can flourish with respect to transition to a functional differentiation of the social system. This, however, cannot happen by chance. Apparently this is one of the many sociological correlations between structural and semantic changes. It becomes clear that sociology does not have any particular knowledge as it has a neutral external observer.

From the presented theses we can conclude that the modern educational system should not enable the differences, which are favoured in the society, and on this basis founded their own selection procedures; but there is the question that remains, what we could be done differently?

From this perspective we are still staying in the historical situation of the 18th Century, where *the modern educational system* was invented on the anthropological premise that human beings remain the "open" project, based on society, milieu, culture...

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*Zvonko Perat***Prezrta zgodovinska prelomnica**

V prispevku se bomo omejili predvsem na stanje razredne stopnje slovenske osnovne šole. Poudarek bomo dali stanju opismenjevanja v začetnih razredih obvezne šole. Podali bomo opis poti do današnjega stanja in s pomočjo izsledkov raziskav o nadarjenih Benjamina Jurmana (raziskovalca na Pedagoškem inštitutu v Ljubljani) podali tudi predlog rešitve iz današnjih zagat.

Slovenci smo se 25. VI. 1991 osamosvojili, toda še danes se ne moreno otresti okusa po petdesetletnem enoumju samoupravnega socializma. Če malo potvorimo Wittgensteina, nam je neka idejnost (metoda) zasenčila druge, zato moramo ponovno pregledati vse – tiste zanemarjene in tiste privilegirane, da bi našli pozabljene poti k pismenosti, ki usiha. To žalostno stanje smo dosegli v desetletju (1945–1955) vzpostavljanja enoumne šole »delavcev, kmetov in poštene inteligence« ter s tremi socialističnimi šolskimi reformami (1955–1991). Današnja slovenska reforma je samo vztrajanje na tej enobarvni poti.

Imamo demokratično nacionalno državo, zato nam dejanj ne sme nihče vsiljevati. Izgubili smo pravico stokati, da so nam rešitve vsiljene. Če smo v skladu z refrenom znane revolucionarne pesmi »svobodo si vzamemo sami«, sprejeli težo svobode, smo sprejeli tudi odgovornost za svoja dejanja. Sedaj smo prvič v zgodovini postali odgovorni tudi za naše nacionalno šolstvo. Te priložnosti pa še nismo izkoristili.

*Ključne besede:* opismenjevanje v luči reform šole, pedagogika kapitala in pedagogika culture; zgradba pojmov na osnovi abstraktov ali generatorov; nacionalna zgodovina v služb razvoja demokracije in nacionalnega samozavedanja; Državotvorna zavest malega naroda

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When we speak of education, we usually think about international activities, which try to develop the abilities (competences) of an individual, which then lead to the some kind of social action. This starting point has the foundation in the following results of researching the problem of education. The notion of education as a social activity is founded on the premises, which have come about from the social-historical circumstances and from the theoretical reflection about the human being as a social entity as well as from the theory of social change. The need to clarify the notion of education and what could be expected from education comes from taking a second look at how the relationship between human beings and society can be conceptualised.

*Key words:* Luhmann's Theory of Education, education

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### **Luhmannova teorija izobraževanja**

Kadar govorimo o vzgoji in izobraževanju, običajno mislimo na mednarodne dejavnosti, ki poskušajo razviti sposobnosti (kompetence) posameznika, ki potem vodijo k neke vrste družbenemu delovanju. To izhodišče ima osnovo v naslednjih rezultatih raziskovanja problema vzgoje in izobraževanja. Pojem (koncept) vzgoje in izobraževanja kot socialne aktivnosti je osnovan na premisah, ki izvirajo iz družbeno-zgodovinskih okoliščin in iz teoretičnega premišljevanja o človeku kot socialnem bitju po eni strani, po drugi stani pa iz teorije družbenih sprememb. Potreba po tem, da bi razjasnili pojem vzgoje in izobraževanja in to, kar lahko pričakujemo od vzgoje in izobraževanja, izhaja iz tega, kako lahko konceptualiziramo odnos med človekom in družbo.

*Ključne besede:* Luhmannova teorija izobraževanja, izobraževanje

*Zdenko Kodelja*

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### **Religious Education and the Teaching about Religions**

The concept and term "religious education" are usually understood in two different ways: firstly, as a "denominational religious education", which is also called "confessional religious education" or "confessional religious instruction" and, secondly, as a "nondenominational or non-confessional religious education". In strictly secular countries, where confessional religious education (which main aim is to produce religious commitment to one particular faith) is legally forbidden in public schools (as, for example, in France, Slovenia and in the USA), only teaching about religions - which is a form of non-confessional religious education - is possible. Teaching about religions can be taught as a specific school subject or as an integral part of other regular subjects such as history, ethics, philosophy, arts, civic education, etc. The integration of content about religions in these regular school subjects is more or less present in all countries, while teaching about religions as a particular subject exists only in some countries. One of them is Slovenia, where the subject is called "Religions and Ethics". Its main aims are to give students an opportunity to further expand and develop their basic knowledge of the world religions and ethics, which they obtain in other school subjects and in this way to help them understand the importance and meaning of religious and ethical issues; to stimulate and prepare them for tolerant and respectful discussion of religious and ethical questions; to develop the capacity to understand others in their otherness; to prepare students for a life in a pluralistic