

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY PLURALISTIC SWEDEN

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DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE,
HISTORY OF IDEAS, AND RELIGION



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

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Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden

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Abstract

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In the mandatory, integrative and non-confessional school subject of Religious Education in Sweden, all students are taught together regardless of religious or secular affiliation. The overall aim of this thesis is to explore and analyse how Religious Education (RE) can be socially constructed in the upper secondary school classroom practice in the pluralistic context of contemporary Sweden.

The result is based on findings from participant observations of 125 Religious Education lessons at three upper secondary schools in Sweden, both on vocational programs and on preparatory programs for higher education. Discourse analysis, curriculum theory, and didaktik of religion are used as theoretical and analytic approaches.

The findings indicate that a secularist discourse was hegemonic in the classroom practice and implied norm of talking about religion, religions and worldviews as something outdated and belonging to history. A non-religious, atheistic position was articulated as neutral and unbiased in relation to the subject matter and was associated with being a rational, critically thinking person. However, there were also spiritual and swedishness discourses of religion that in some respects challenged the hegemonic discourse, but also enforced it. The programs at upper secondary schools were influenced by different educational discourses called a private discourse and an academic rational discourse, which affected the construction of the subject in these different contexts. Implications of the discourses are discussed in relation to the classroom practice and aims of Religious Education.

To Vanja, Bina and Emanuel

Contents

Acknowledgements

1.	INTRODUCTION	17
	Aim and questions	21
	Disposition	21
2.	BACKGROUND	23
	Perspectives on school subjects.....	23
	The curricula and perspectives of knowledge	25
	Different models of Religious Education.....	27
	Different pedagogical approaches to RE.....	29
	From fostering into Christianity to critical analysis of religion in society - the development of RE in Sweden	30
	RE and the emerging democracy.....	31
	The “objectivity requirement”.....	33
	Fundamental values	36
	The development of upper secondary school.....	39
	RE in comprehensive school and upper secondary school.....	41
	The syllabi for RE in 1994 and 2011 - a comparison.....	42
	Previous research.....	44
	The religious landscape	44
	Classroom Research.....	56
	Previous research in relation to this study.....	64
3.	THEORETICAL APPROACHES	67
	Discourses as constructions of meaning	67
	Contingency.....	69
	Didaktik of RE.....	69
	Religious Education and Religious Studies	72
	The subject and the classroom as discursive practices	73
	Religions and worldviews - definitions	75
	Discourse analysis in this study.....	80
4.	METHOD	83
	Ethnography.....	84
	Ethnography in school settings.....	84

Quality in qualitative studies.....	86
Criteria of quality	87
Reflexions on the role of researcher.....	89
Empirical data	91
Pilot study	91
The study.....	92
Implementation of the study	98
Analysis	100
Ethical considerations	102
5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE	107
Prime time of history	108
Diversity of views	110
A neutral position.....	115
Non-religious views seen as neutral.....	115
Atheism as neutrality	117
Atheism as normality.....	118
Criticism of Religion	120
Critical thinking.....	120
To criticize	121
Criticism that is not permitted	123
Science and faith.....	125
Individualism.....	130
My own choice	130
Individualism and the rights of children	133
The highest authority.....	134
Modern myths.....	137
“Man is the measure of all things”	139
You decide	139
Central values	143
Religion as a private matter	145
Religion is private – what is not articulated.....	145
Freedom from religion	147
Implications and concluding remarks	151
6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE.....	153
A spiritual dimension	153

A personal interpretation of life	159
What is a human being?	170
The human being as a meaning-seeker	170
The human being as comprising a soul.....	173
Concepts with religious roots.....	176
Holiness.....	177
Sin and forgiveness	180
Your time on earth	187
Implications and concluding remarks	193
7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE.....	197
Sweden – a Christian country	198
Alienation and threat.....	203
“We have Santa Claus” – holidays, religion and culture.....	205
“In Sweden we are secular, individualistic and tolerant”.....	210
“Like worshipping Mickey Mouse”: Othering of the religious.....	217
Implications and concluding remarks	225
8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES - A PRIVATE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE	227
“Me, myself and I” or “All human beings” – articulations in the first or third person.....	228
“Sure, I am a Muslim” or “Muslims think...”	228
Private or general level	230
Emotional articulations.....	235
Reproducing facts or analysing	241
Professionalism through the student-teacher relationship or academic knowledge.....	247
Only to pass or only to get high marks.....	249
Implications and concluding remarks	252
9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION.....	255
Summary of the results	255
Discourses of religion, religions and worldviews	257
Representations of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.....	261
Social constructions of a subject in practice	263
Didaktik implications for the RE practice.....	266

Constructs of “we” and “the Other”	266
Managing diversity	268
Different ways of organizing teaching	270
To be a teacher of Religious Education – a mission impossible?	273
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING AV STUDIEN	275
Syfte och frågeställningar.....	276
Bakgrund.....	277
Religionskunskap	277
Religionskunskapsämnets framväxt i Sverige	279
Tidigare forskning.....	281
Teoretiska utgångspunkter	282
Metod	284
Resultat.....	284
En sekularistisk diskurs	285
En andlig diskurs.....	287
En svenskhetsdiskurs	289
En privat och en akademiskt rationell diskurs	291
Avslutande diskussion.....	294
REFERENCES	301
APPENDIX	
Figures	
Fig 1. The didaktik triangle	74
Fig 2. Overview of the observations	96
Fig 3. Model of analysing discourses of religion, religions and worldviews in the classroom practice	100

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Vänernborg, 30 October 2015

Karin Kittelmann Flensner

1. Introduction

Student: There are a lot of prejudices I guess. Because, I mean, in the media, Islam is like, pictured like a terrible religion that oppresses women and whatnot. So then you get a lot of prejudices. Everybody has perhaps not had Religious Education or read or know much about Islam. And then you believe everything the media say.

Elev: Det är en hel del fördomar antar jag. Eftersom, jag menar, i media så målas typ islam upp som en fruktansvärd religion som förtrycker kvinnor och allt möjligt liksom. Så då får man ju en hel del fördomar. För alla har kanske inte läst religionskunskap eller läst eller vet särskilt mycket om islam. Och då tror man ju på det media säger.

Audiofile 19 October 2011

The student cited above perceives Religious Education¹ as a tool for working against prejudice and increasing knowledge and understanding. In the classroom practice of Religious Education, students and teachers meet and dwell on questions of pluralism, religions and worldviews, of prejudice and tolerance, and of how they themselves and other people perceive the world. This thesis is about a school subject that manoeuvres in the midst of a field that on the one hand concerns crucial knowledge in a pluralistic society, and on the other hand deals with highly contested questions in a society characterised by diversity and secularity. Increased migration and travel, changing conditions with regard to communication media and use of the Internet are some of the factors that have contributed to a more pluralistic society. This development has also contributed to the new visibility of religion (Davie, 2007; Esposito, Fasching & Lewis, 2008; Skeie, 2009). Simultaneously, secularity² has increased, not least in Swedish society and questions pertaining to freedom of religion in the public sphere are a subject of debate.

¹ I use the term “Religious Education” as this is internationally used for both confessional and non-confessional versions of the subject in different contexts and with different aims. See, for example, the *British Journal of Religious Education*. Sometimes the term “Religion Education” is used to mark the non-confessional character of the school subject based on a Religious Studies approach (cf. Berglund, 2013; Jensen, 2008).

² In the literature the words secularity and secularism are often used interchangeably. I will, however, in line with Possamai (2009) and Scharffs (2011), distinguish between the two concepts and use the word secularity descriptively when referring to secularity as a result and part of theories of secularity that try to grasp the role of religion in the contemporary world. Secularism, I will use as a normative and ideological stance, with reference to proponents who many times can be described as anti-religious and who advocate that the public sphere should be kept free from religious expressions.

The role of publicly funded education becomes in this context complex. Teaching and schools can both be seen as mediators of tradition as well as constructing national, mono-cultural projects, but they also serve as the main forum for creating social cohesion between diverse sub-cultures. The currently compulsory school subject Religious Education (henceforward RE) in Sweden can be described as *non-confessional*³ as it is stated in the curricula that it should be neutral in relation to different religions and worldviews⁴ and not promote any religion more than another. In the syllabus of Swedish non-confessional RE it is stated that:

Teaching should take as its starting point a view of society characterized by openness regarding lifestyle, outlooks on life, differences between people, and also give students the opportunity to develop a preparedness for understanding and living in a society characterized by diversity (Skolverket, 2011a)

Meanwhile RE has its roots in the Swedish national state church, Church of Sweden, and its traditions and was originally introduced to strengthen the “pure evangelical Lutheran doctrine” of the citizens, although this goal had already been abolished in the early 1900s (Algotsson, 1975; Hartman, 1996). However, the subject is nonetheless intended to transfer certain values such as tolerance and respect for different lifestyles and worldviews. This means that there are several points of tension within the subject area *per se* that teachers has to deal with.

The Swedish subject of RE can also be described as *integrative* (Alberts, 2007, 2010) as students share the same classroom regardless of personal relation to the subject.⁵ Due to increasing pluralism in Sweden, students from different backgrounds and with different relationships to the subject matter meet in the classroom. School can be seen as a reflection of society, and if society is characterised in terms of pluralism, this will in various ways affect what happens in the classrooms. Although the Swedish school system in many ways is marked

³ The Swedish word [*icke-konfessionell*] could also be translated *non-denominational*.

⁴ In the English translation of the syllabus of Religious Education (Skolverket, 2011c) The National Agency for Education uses “outlooks on life” for the Swedish word [*livsåskådning*]. I use the English word “worldview” as this translation seems to correspond to the Swedish concept and more used in research (cf. Westerlund, 2013). The concept of worldview will be further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

⁵ The subject is mandatory at all levels of Elementary School as well as in all programs of the upper secondary school, and it is not possible to opt out. In this sense the subject has no special status and is like any other school subject.

1. INTRODUCTION

by growing segregation (Bunar, 2010), the classroom can still be seen as a place where people with different backgrounds share a common space, learn about and discuss topics which for many students are very personal. However, Sweden is greatly influenced by secularisation (Andersson & Sander, 2009; af Burén, 2015; Thurfjell, 2015; Zuckerman, 2009), and this means that in the same classroom there is often a large group of students who do not consider themselves religious at all and have vague notions about the different religious traditions and what it possibly could mean to have a faith and be a part of a religious tradition (Lövheim & Bromander, 2012; Sjöborg, 2012). In the same classroom, however, there are students who in different ways and to varying degrees see themselves as part of different religious traditions and have their own personal interpretation of that particular tradition.

When working as a teacher of Religious Education in the Swedish upper secondary school I often experienced this situation as a concrete professional dilemma which I as a teacher had to handle. I tried to fulfil the demands of the curriculum and syllabus and at the same time manage expectations from students with different relations to and opinions about religion and religions in a respectful and professional way. In my work, questions of how to operate in this minefield arose, but also why religion in some respect was such a sensitive subject. When looking for research concerning these questions I found that there were very few studies that had looked into what happens in the classroom in general. There were even fewer studies that had taken an interest in what happens in the classrooms where various school subjects are taught and still fewer studies of RE-classrooms, and this became the starting point of the present study. One way of approaching classrooms where different school-subjects are taught is through a lens that focuses on the interplay between subject content, students and teachers (Englund, 1997; Schoenfeld, 2012). The classrooms are affected by the articulations of teachers and students and the subject of instruction (content). However, the classroom is highly influenced by societal features and discourses in the society of which it is a part.

This is an ethnographic study, and I conducted participant observations of RE-lessons at three upper secondary schools during the school year 2011-2012,⁶

⁶ In 2011 a new curriculum was introduced in Sweden – both in the compulsory school and in the upper secondary school – and it was gradually implemented over three years. This means that some classes studied RE according to the old curriculum, Lpf94 (Skolverket 2006a) and the syllabus of RE (Skolverket, 2000a) and that some classes studied RE according to the new curriculum and syllabus, Lgy11 (Skolverket 2011b, Skolverket 2011a).

both in vocational programs and preparatory programs for higher education. My focus of interest is how the school subject of RE is socially constructed in practice, but many aspects affecting its social construction are of a general character and have relevance in different educational settings as well as for other school subjects. Academically this thesis is positioned at the intersection between the fields of Religious Studies and Educational Science and has in this sense an interdisciplinary approach. Taking an interdisciplinary approach is always a balancing act since different disciplines have different traditions and theories and many readers tend to approach the text from one or the other field. That the aim of this thesis can be seen as belonging to two disciplines will become clear in the empirical chapters where the first three have a more Religious Studies orientation compared to the fourth which has a more education-oriented focus. Put differently, the first three empirical chapters are oriented towards the content of the discourses found in the RE classroom, the educational question of *what*, and the fourth empirical chapter more towards the educational question of *how* these discourses are articulated. I also want to describe the thesis as a study of *Religious Education didaktik* [Swedish: *religionsdidaktik*],⁷ which is one of several sub-disciplines of Religious Studies (cf. Berglund, 2010). The school-subject of RE shares the aim of Religious Studies to describe and analyse aspects of religion and religions from different perspectives. However, the subject of RE (together with all other school subjects) also has general educational aims concerning learning and the personal development of students but also aims concerning democratic values such as tolerance and equality. Thus the social construction of the subject of RE is of interest both from societal and democratic perspectives, but also from the perspective of educational science and an example of how subjects can be constructed in practice. From a Religious Studies perspective, little is known about discourses of Swedish non-confessional integrative RE to which this study is a contribution.

⁷ The Swedish connotation of the word *didaktik* as in *religionsdidaktik* is more in line with the German perception of the word *didaktik* than the Anglo-American connotation of the word *didactics*. In the Swedish understanding of *didaktik* the concept both includes theoretical and practical aspects (for a discussion of the use of the concept in different contexts, see for example Hamilton, 1999; Kansanen, 2009; Wahlström, 2015). As there is no exact corresponding concept in English I follow the example of Kansanen (2009) and use the German (and Swedish) term *Religious Education Didaktik* to mark the broader educational content of the word than I understand that the word *Didactics* usually has in the English-speaking world. Religious Education Didaktik refers both to theoretical knowledge of the field of RE as an area of research, but also refers to the practical art of teaching in RE.

Aim and questions

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore and analyse how Religious Education (RE) can be socially constructed in the upper secondary classroom practice in the pluralistic context of contemporary Sweden. The research questions that have guided the work are:

- What discourses of religion, religions and worldviews are articulated in the context of Religious Education in the classroom practice?
- How are they articulated?
- What implications do these discourses have for the social construction of the subject taught in schools?

Disposition

The thesis consists of nine chapters. In the first chapter the field, focus and aim of the study is introduced, followed by a presentation of the historical background and development of present-day RE in Chapter 2. Thereafter research related to the wider context of the religious landscape in contemporary society, with an emphasis on religion and youth is presented. As the present study is a classroom study, there is a special focus on classroom studies of RE. In Chapter 3 theoretical approaches of curriculum theory and discourse analysis that have guided the work are outlined. Methodological considerations concerning ethnography in educational settings, how the study was carried out, and how the empirical material was analysed are presented in Chapter 4, as well as reflections upon ethical concerns related to the research process.

The results of the study are presented in Chapters 5-8. The first three of these chapters focus on the discourses of religion, religions and worldview that was articulated in the RE classroom practice, and are structured through clusters of articulations. Focus in the fourth of the empirical chapters highlights two different educational discourses that affected the social construction of RE in the classroom practice. In Chapter 5 it is shown how a secularist discourse was articulated in the RE-practice. This discourse was at some points challenged by a spiritual discourse, and in Chapter 6 it is outlined and analysed. There were also articulations in the RE-practice that linked Sweden to a Christian heritage and defined Sweden as a Christian country. The way that Swedishness was constructed is presented in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8 two different educational discourses, a private and a rational academic discourse that affected the construction of RE are analysed. In Chapter 9 the thesis is summarized and

discussed in relation to the aim and theoretical approach of the study as well as in relation to its implications for research within the field of RE.

2. Background

The background consists of two parts that both constitute the context of the study. The first part will contextualize the thesis through perspectives on school subjects, and also describe different social constructions of RE in different countries. The historical development of RE in Sweden and the background of the Swedish upper secondary school will be presented. As this study was implemented in the shift between the curricula of Lpf 94 (Skolverket, 2006a) and Lgy 11 (Skolverket 2011b), a comparison of the RE syllabi in these curricula is made. The second part of the background consists of previous research related to religion and youth in contemporary pluralistic societies. As the present study is a classroom study, special attention is given to classroom research within the field of RE.

Perspectives on school subjects

When societies became more complex regarding social differentiation,⁸ one consequence was division of labour with the development of specialized knowledge. In the aftermath of this development, the need to organize the transfer of knowledge to the next generation through various educational institutions emerged. Over the centuries the discussions about what is worth knowing, what to include in education and what might be acceptable to leave out have been intense and are still on-going. Knowledge has traditionally been organized in different areas and in different school subjects. School subjects can be seen as an area of knowledge that functions as the hub around which the school organizes educational activities (Goodson & Marsh, 1996). This thesis is concerned with how a school subject is socially constructed in practice. But what is a school subject? The premise for this study is that all subjects must

⁸ This occurred at different times in different parts of the world and is closely linked to the political and economic development of the societies – for example, the Greek education system arose in a more organized form some two thousand years before the first embryo to the thirteenth-century school system existed in the area that eventually would become Sweden. The first National Education Act was introduced in 1571 during the Swedish Lutheran Reformation and the nationalization of Sweden as a nation state. It should be added that education in pre-modern societies was by no means available to the general public but only to the children of the elite.

be seen as social constructions that have been shaped throughout history based on different social, political and economic needs and interests.

During antiquity education was already organized into different subjects for both younger and older pupils. The curriculum of the time, *Encyclical paideia* divided teaching into *trivium*, which included the subjects of grammar, dialectics or logic, and rhetoric, and *quadrivium* containing the subjects of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. This way of organizing teaching became a model for the European educational system and has survived through the centuries. *Triviums* subjects, with the addition of catechism, were taught in medieval Swedish so-called *chatedral schools* and somewhat later *trivial schools* [Swedish: *katedralskolor* och *trivialskolor*] i.e. the first forms of organized education. Gradually secondary education arose in the form of high schools and academies (Arfwedson & Arfwedson, 2002; Lundgren, 1989). Goodson and March note that school subjects have a normative position, and that few ever question this design of education. Different school subjects are “treated as taken for granted givens” (Goodson & March, 1996, p. 1).

Many of today's school subjects derive their content from the university disciplines,⁹ but these are in turn also an expression of one among many possible ways of organizing knowledge. The boundaries for inclusion and exclusion of a certain area of content, discipline or subject have many times become an infected controversy, and often led to the creation of new disciplines and/or sub-disciplines (Goodson, 2005; Sandin & Säljö, 2006). Today's academic disciplines have their roots in the medieval universities where the work was organized through faculties of theology, law, medicine and philosophy (Richardson, 2010). From those main categorizations of knowledge, an enormous number of disciplines and sub-disciplines with theories and traditions have developed. The story of education can be described as the story of specialization in increasingly narrow fields. For example, the discipline of pedagogy has its roots in philosophy, and during the twentieth century psychology and sociology put their stamp on the discipline. From the field of pedagogy there have developed hundreds of specializations that in one way or another concern learning and educational issues (Englund, 2004a). These are

⁹ This statement is true in varying degrees. I.e. Geography arose as a school subject and made its way into the academic world (Goodson, 2005). Many subjects, for example aesthetic-practical subjects (music, art, crafts, sports) have throughout history been taught at the university level, but to a greater extent developed in their own right in comparison to other school subjects that still have a close link to the university discipline, for example history and RE.

2. BACKGROUND

sometimes described as “interdisciplinary”, sometimes as the main body of pedagogy.¹⁰

The curricula and perspectives of knowledge

To formulate curricula has been, and is still, a way to try to influence children and young people and accordingly, the desirable development of society. Curriculum theory analyses the curriculum in historical and political contexts and considers the curriculum as an expression of ideological positions (Deng & Luke, 2008; Englund, 1986; Englund, Forsberg & Sundberg, 2012; Goodson & Marsh, 1996; Goodson & Pinar, 1995; Lundgren, 1989). The curriculum thus becomes the object of political struggle - What knowledge is advocated and favoured? What perspectives, whose knowledge is given precedence? Should teaching primarily constitute a conservative, preserving institution for children to be subordinated to society, or should education prepare pupils to take an active part in civic life? What type of activity dominates in the classrooms - reproduction of facts or conversations on how teaching content can be understood or anything in between? A curriculum indicates what society perceives as important knowledge and hence what is considered less important. The content of different school subjects is from this perspective of central importance for a society (Englund et al., 2012; Goodson, 2005; Goodson & Marsh, 1996). Bråten (2013), who developed a model of comparative studies in RE argues that when comparing school-subjects in different countries the research must take into consideration the specific dimensions of supranational (global), national and subnational processes and she distinguishes between four levels of curriculum: societal, institutional, instructional and experimental. This highlights the complexity of what a subject is and how it is shaped in practice.

In the tradition of curriculum theory and related fields, school subjects (and curricula) can be scrutinized through the lens of educational philosophy. In the last century, it has been possible to distinguish (at least) four main approaches that concern perspectives on the focus of teaching and the main aim of education:¹¹ *Essentialism*, whose proponents see the transfer of knowledge as the

¹⁰ Just to mention a few academic “subjects” with a general educational character; Didaktik, Educational Science, Pedagogical Work, Educational psychology or Educational philosophy, and in many cases there is no clear boundary between these disciplines.

¹¹ For a similar categorisation see, for example, Deng and Luke (2008) who distinguish between approaches characterised by academic rationalism, social efficiency, humanism, and social reconstructionism to differentiate approaches in education.

main task for education and have a strong focus on facts, see the school subject as closely related to the academic discipline. *Progressivism* is associated with the pedagogical visions of John Dewey, and in contrast to essentialism, puts the learning of the individual at the centre. The pupil in the tradition of progressivism is seen as a “bearer of knowledge” and teaching is not (exclusively) based on the academic scientific knowledge, but rather the pupil's experiences and questions constitute the basis for teaching. Englund (1986, 1997) also discerns a tension between the educational approach that sees classical education and the transfer of traditions and cultural heritage as public education's main task – labelled as *perennialism* – and the approach that is described as *reconstructivism*, i.e. teaching that puts society, critical thinking and civic competence of the individual at the centre. According to Englund (1997) the essentialist perspective has dominated Swedish education, but somewhat challenged by progressivism. The empirical result of this study can be seen in light of these perspectives.

The current curricula of Lgy11 (Skolverket, 2011b) have a clearer essentialist profile than their predecessor and were preceded by an intense public debate (Selander, 2011). The Swedish school system underwent in the 1990s major changes, which also affected the perception of school subjects. One of the fundamental alterations was that the “steering system” was reformed towards management by goals, inspired by New Public Management (see, for example Paradeise, Reale, Bleiklie & Ferlie, 2009; Richardson, 2010; Waldow, 2010). This meant that the government formulated a number of goals to be reached in the various activities, but how was optional. This way of thinking was also reflected in the curriculum. Rather than articulate what teachers should teach about, a number of goals the students would have achieved after completing the course were formulated - the focus shifted from teaching to learning. In the rhetoric of the curriculum of 1994 factual knowledge was deemphasized in favour of skills or abilities. In the debate the proponents of this type of curriculum saw a dismantling of what they perceived as a “Taylorist school” (essentialist, in Englund's wording) and replaced by a school designed to meet the demands of the late modern/post-modern and post-industrial society, which included a more relativistic and relational approach to knowledge.

One way to describe what is happening now [2001] is the following: The school's organization of and work is changing from a division of subjects and lessons. Age-homogeneous schedule-controlled classes where everybody does the same things at the same time in a vertically led activity, where the

2. BACKGROUND

teacher dominates and controls what happens, to a more flexible organization of work characterized by integration, driven by small workgroups who are organized as projects, where relations between teachers and students are more horizontal, less time is divided and the rooms more flexible and reflection on what is going on increases (Skolverket, 2001, p. 29 own translation).

More than a decade later, it is obvious that in the dispute between “traditionalists” or “essentialists” who promote a structured, school subject- and teacher-oriented education, and “progressive” proponents who advocate reality-related, thematic, subject-integrated, pupil-oriented teaching, the traditionalists have been the successful party. The design of the Curricula of Lgr11 (Skolverket, 2011c) and Lgy11 (Skolverket, 2011b) emphasizes factual knowledge to a larger extent, but the marks are described in terms of different abilities or skills at different levels of how to deal with facts – i.e. ability to analyse, reason, critical thinking etc.

RE has in many countries been the subject of heated debate - should it be part of the compulsory school system, should it be confessional, is it first and foremost part of a perennialistic project that transfers traditions or can it be constructed in a progressivistic way? In different countries the solutions to these questions have varied.

Different models of Religious Education

Religious Education is a school subject that shows considerable variations between countries with regard to content, objectives and design. In many countries there is a strong relationship between national identity, religion and thus the social construction of RE (Eriksen, 2010). Willaime (2007) argues that the construction of the subject can be seen as an indicator of how the relations of church-state and school-religion are designed in the various nations. In countries where the national identity is closely linked to a particular denomination, there is clear evidence of this in the curricula and syllabi. In many countries RE does not exist as a compulsory non-confessional school subject. In an overview of RE in Europe,¹² three different models for dealing with religious education can be discerned: *no RE in public school*, *confessional RE* and *non-confessional RE*.

¹² I here limit the presentation to Europe.

To stress how diversely RE is organised, a presentation of different models of RE in Europe will briefly be outlined: In some countries, RE is considered a strictly private matter and something that parents can arrange to suit their preference if they wish. In Europe, only France is applying this model in line with the principle of *laïcité* and there is no religious education at all within the school system, but the religious instruction French students are offered is linked to voluntary teaching through various religious organizations (Willaime, 2007).¹³ Another way to organize religious education, which is the most prevalent in Europe, is that students are separated by denominational affiliation and taught about their own faith (and sometimes about other religious traditions) from an inside and confessional perspective. This model is applied in countries such as Belgium, Finland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria, etc., where students are separated based on religious affiliation, often taught by representatives of their own religion, and curriculum and teaching materials are dependent on religious orientation. In some countries (for example Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Malta) only Christianity is taught but it is possible to opt out. In countries such as Luxembourg, Belgian Flanders, Germany, Austria, Romania, Finland, and Spain, the pupils can choose between instruction in different religious traditions, an “ethics” alternative, or opt out. The third category is non-confessional religious teaching where students are taught together regardless of religious affiliation, and instruction is meant to provide students with a neutral and objective picture of the different religions. This model of non-confessional RE that Alberts (2007) calls “integrative RE” occurs in countries such Norway, Sweden, England, Wales and Switzerland (Björlin, 2006; Willaime, 2007). These models apply to publicly funded state schools, but it should be noted that in most countries there exist private schools run by different religious denominations that also offer confessional RE. These two ways of constructing RE (confessional/non-confessional) can also be described in terms of a theological approach/Religious Studies approach. Another dimension within RE, more rooted in educational theory, concerns to what extent the subject and/or teaching can be described as content-oriented or student-oriented. Yet another way of categorising the subject is to look into who is responsible for the subject – the state, the denomination or a combination.

¹³ However, issues related to religion are the subject of teaching included in other subjects such as history and social science. This model is also applied in publicly funded schools in the United States. However in France, beginning in September 2015, a subject called *Morale Laïque* will be introduced that will in some respect resemble aspects of the Swedish subject of RE.

2. BACKGROUND

Different pedagogical approaches to RE

All over the world there exist various models for the design of the school subject of RE. Within both confessional and non-confessional RE there are also different pedagogical models that advocate different course designs, based on their view of learning and what is considered relevant knowledge in RE. In Sweden, this type of educational modelling is rather unusual in RE, maybe with the exception of “life-question pedagogy” (Dahlin, 2004; Hartman, 1986a, 1986b; Löfstedt, 2013) but in Europe, and not least in the British context, a number of different pedagogical models are designed and they are to various degrees empirically based. There are different ways of labelling and characterising these models. Almost every author advocating a certain approach to the pedagogy of RE also includes a chapter describing the field of competing pedagogies and in doing this also characterises and positions him- or herself ontologically and pedagogically in different ways. See for example Barnes (2014), Erricker (2010), Gearon (2013), Grimmitt (2000), Jackson (1997, 2004) or Wright (2007).

In the educational debate about RE it is common to distinguish between teaching and learning *in* religion, *about* religion and *from* religion (Grimmitt, 1987). Denominational/confessional teaching is perceived as teaching *in* religion that aims to strengthen the students’ own religious and moral development, provide students with knowledge of their own religious beliefs, values, and traditions, and strengthen their religious identity. Teaching *about* religion means a type of RE where teaching and learning have a non-confessional foundation and are based on the academic discipline of Religious Studies. Beliefs and religious expression in different religions are treated as one among many forms of human activity. Learning *from* religions highlights the potential for personal development through RE touching upon life issues of an existential character and provides opportunities for students to reflect on their own views in relation to the various religions’ answers to these questions (Berglund, 2009; Grimmitt, 1987; Teece, 2010). As will be shown below, over time the Swedish curriculum for RE has gone from a clear confessional course *in* Christianity, to a course that emphasises learning *from* religion during the twentieth century, and finally adopted the current curriculum, that particularly emphasises the pupils’ analytical skills in relation to religion as a societal phenomenon, i.e. learning *about* religion (Osbeck & Pettersson, 2009).

From fostering into Christianity to critical analysis of religion in society - the development of RE in Sweden

To provide an understanding of the context in which the subject is a part and the discourses of religion(s) in relation to the school subject of RE in Sweden, I will here present the historical roots and development of the subject of RE,¹⁴ with emphasis on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and then analyse the subject in the two syllabi in use when this study was carried out. During the history of education the pendulum has oscillated between teaching as a transmission of traditions and facts and student-centred teaching that puts the student's personality, development and democratic education at the centre, and this is evident in the development of Swedish RE.

Throughout the history of Sweden, the development of the state, religion (in the guise of Christianity and the Church of Sweden) and education have been closely interlinked. The geographical area that eventually would become Sweden is said to have been Christianized during the tenth century. The king Gustav Vasa (1496-1560) saw the possibilities of using the church in the consolidation of the nation state and pushed through the Reformation, and in 1593 the "pure evangelical Lutheran doctrine" was adopted as the only permitted religion and Luther's catechism became a unifying ideology.¹⁵ When Sweden as a country grew and the nation-state expanded, the Swedish government, like other European states, emphasized the unity of the people, language and religion, this even more after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.¹⁶ In the Protestant churches the Bible had a prominent position, and the Swedish clergy drew early attention to the importance of a literate population. In the

¹⁴ In this section I do not distinguish between the subject of RE in compulsory school and in upper secondary school.

¹⁵ In the year 2000 the Church of Sweden was separated from the state. Thus Sweden now has no state church and the Church of Sweden is one among several denominations.

¹⁶ Sweden is often described as a homogeneous country, but this must be viewed in light of the official propaganda and the image the government wanted to convey. Sweden has never been a completely homogeneous society either linguistically or religiously. During much of the history, the borders had a different design and in the eastern half of the empire (present-day Finland), the majority of the population spoke Finnish. A large group of these Finns were orthodox believers. In the north lived (and live) Sami and Torne Valley Finns [Swedish: *Tornedalsfinnar*] and in the urban areas lived crafts- and tradesmen from different part of the world. Within the borders of the Swedish nation-state also lived (and live) non-sedentary groups such as different Roma-groups, Travellers and travelling Jews (Hazell, 2011; Svanberg & Tydén, 1999).

2. BACKGROUND

Church Law of 1683, the responsibility for teaching reading and Luther's Small Catechism was laid on parents and Masters. The Church, represented by the priest, would control the knowledge in annual catechetical meetings [Swedish: *husförhör*]. In Sweden, this arrangement persisted even after a general elementary school had been established in 1842. To be able to read the Bible and know the Catechism was the qualification for taking Holy Communion, which in turn was the requirement for becoming an accepted member of society (Alberts, 2007; Hartman, 2000). The roots of what we now call RE therefore constituted the very reason for the creation of the public educational system, and RE was the early school's main assignment, accounting for the bulk of instructional time. For an overview of Religious Education in Swedish grammar school and upper secondary school 1807-1911 including curricula/policy documents, names and teaching time, see *Appendix 1*.

RE and the emerging democracy

In the political discussions about general education that took place during the nineteenth century the Liberals emphasized the importance of education and civic knowledge for both individuals and society, while conservative commentators saw risks in educating the general public. The solution and compromise resulted in Christianity playing a prominent role in the new elementary school. The minister became chairman of the school board and one of the aims of elementary school was to prepare students for taking part in the Confirmation of the Church of Sweden (Almén, 2000). Hartman (2000) argues that there is a turning point in the late nineteenth century when schools became responsible for religious upbringing. Compulsory school attendance was introduced in 1882, and the responsibility for religious education was formally transferred from the parents to the public school in 1883. It can be seen as a paradox that the responsibility for religious upbringing was moved from the private sphere into the public at the same time as Swedish society was moving towards secularization in the sense that the influence of religion in the public realm declined. RE was thus of significant importance in the early elementary school, and the school's educational and fostering role was closely linked to the subject of RE along with the teaching of Swedish and History.

The great social transformations of the nineteenth century related to industrialization and urbanization led to changed demands on the kind of knowledge the school was providing. Mathematics and science became more

important, and there was a heated debate concerning the role of classical languages versus modern languages in the upper secondary schools. “Subject overload” [Swedish: *ämnesträngsel*] was debated (see for example Nordlund, 1921) and it was argued that some subjects had to be left out or that time allotted to them had to be reduced. RE was during the nineteenth century never at risk of disappearing from the schedule, but in the reform of 1905, where the government tried to tighten the regulations for the different kinds of upper secondary school, the subject got less time except for those who chose the classical program at upper secondary school (Nordlund, 1921). Meanwhile popular movements such as the labour movement, the temperance movement and the Free Church movement¹⁷ grew strong with demands of democratization, universal suffrage and civil rights and freedoms. Within these groups parents for various reasons opposed their children being taught the Swedish Church doctrine in the form of Luther’s catechism. Parents belonging to Free Churches considered starting their own schools (Gerle, 2007). In this situation, the authorities chose to prioritize school unity over religious unity. This was done in 1919 by renaming the elementary school subject *Christianity* (from *Biblical History and Catechism*), and in 1928 the name of the subject at upper secondary school was changed from *Christianity* to *Knowledge of Christianity* (See *Appendix 1*). The subject should, according to the syllabus, focus on the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount and some church history. Luther's Small Catechism was no longer used as a textbook on the subject and the subject would no longer serve as preparation for Confirmation in the Church of Sweden (Alberts, 2007). Almén (2000) argues that this type of arrangement became a precedent for how the Swedish school system would solve the growing diversification in society:

The way Swedish authorities tried to solve this conflict discloses an attitude which since then has grown into a specific Swedish school policy. The unity of the school system was defended when the religious unity was lost... School unity was defended out of fear of a segregated society. If all parents could trust the same school, then all youth could be educated in the same milieu, sharing a rich common frame of reference, having childhood friends with backgrounds formed by other opinions and perhaps also by other social

¹⁷ In 1858 the prohibition to attend religious meetings outside the realm of the Church of Sweden [Swedish: *konventikelplakaten*] was abolished. In 1860 one was allowed to leave the Church of Sweden on the condition of entering another denomination, a condition not abolished until 1951.

2. BACKGROUND

conditions. This fear and this dream were important factors behind the evolution of 'the Swedish model' (Almén, 2000, p. 63).

The subject became “broad” in the sense that distinguishing details of Christian beliefs were avoided in order to make Christians of different denominations accept the subject’s construction.¹⁸ Knowledge about “important non-Christian religions” should also be part of the subject in upper secondary school (Bergqvist & Wallin, 1928). The school commission of 1946 (Ecklesiastikdepartementet, 1948) emphasised that the teacher when teaching about Christianity, had to be aware of the students’ various backgrounds and avoid everything that could be perceived as a “personal attack” [Swedish: *sårande angrepp*] on somebody’s worldview and encourage permissiveness and broadmindedness with regard to freedom of thought. In this document it is also stressed that it is not the task of the school to influence the students to embrace any specific worldview. Instead, through the teaching of RE the students should get the opportunity to create their personal view of life (Ecklesiastikdepartementet, 1948).

The “objectivity requirement”

Religious freedom in the sense that Swedish citizens could leave the Swedish church without entering another denomination was not introduced until the 1950s.¹⁹ In 1962 the nine-year compulsory school was introduced, and in that educational reform the (civic) educational and fostering role was taken over by the subject of civics. In the compulsory school, the name of the subject was changed to *Knowledge about Christianity* [Swedish: *Kristendomskunskap*] and

¹⁸ The right of pupils of other faiths to opt out the teachings of Christianity can be found as early as in the grammar school charter of 1859. Catholics and Jews were given the opportunity instead to receive RE in their own community but this should not affect the possibility to graduate from upper secondary school (Bergqvist, 1905).

¹⁹ Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Swedish constitution: “The public institutions shall combat discrimination of persons on grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic origin, linguistic or religious affiliation, functional disability, sexual orientation, age or other circumstance affecting the individual [...] Everyone shall be guaranteed the following rights and freedoms in his or her relations with the public institutions: freedom of worship: that is, the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others [...] No one shall in his or her relations with the public institutions be coerced to divulge an opinion in a political, religious, cultural or other such connection. Nor may anyone in his or her relations with the public institutions be coerced to participate in a meeting for the shaping of opinion or a demonstration or other manifestation of opinion, or to belong to a political association, religious community or other association for opinion referred to in sentence one” (*The constitution of Sweden: the fundamental laws and the Riksdag Act*, commented and translated by Isberg & Bradfield, 2012).

objectivity requirements were introduced in the syllabus. A similar development occurred at upper secondary school during the same period. In upper secondary school, the issue of objectivity was stressed already in the 1940s (Ecklesiastikdepartementet, 1947)²⁰ and in the proposal of the government commission of 1960, the name was changed to *Knowledge of religion* [Swedish: *religionskunskap*] (Ecklesiastikdepartementet, 1963) and implemented in the curricula of 1965 (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1965). The teaching of RE was then to be *about* religion, unlike before when teaching RE was equated with teaching *in* Christianity.

The RE syllabus of 1962, written for use in the compulsory school, contained a detailed body of facts relating to the history of Christianity, church history, and Bible knowledge. The selection of content was motivated by cultural and historical arguments – in the syllabus it was indicated that contacts with other cultures had increased, and because of this the students needed to have knowledge of their own cultural heritage. But the subject was also motivated through arguments that the subject included existential and universal issues. The syllabus of Lgr 62 stated that the subject should to be objective:

Christian Religious Education must be conducted in a way that *does not violate the individual's right to freedom of thought and belief*. Therefore, instruction should be *objective* in the sense that it renders factual knowledge about the meaning and content of different creeds, without authoritatively seeking to influence pupils to form an opinion (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1962, p. 121, italics in original text, own translation).

At the same time, the subject was to educate and discipline the pupil:

Through facts dealt with within the subject, issues related to pupils' own attitudes toward life are actualized. Norms and ideals of life, which are relevant to their personal growth and foster the pursuit of truth and seriousness in life, can thereby be transferred (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1962, p. 121, own translation).

The “objectivity requirement” led to an animated debate (see for example Algotsson, 1975; Hartman, 1996), which ultimately concerned the core of religious freedom: what rights do individuals have to practice their religion in a

²⁰ It is however questionable if the subject can be described as non-confessional before the syllabus of 1965 as Christianity constituted the overwhelming majority of the teaching content and the instructions are compared to more recent syllabi extremely detailed. Non-Christian religions were described as “foreign religions” which then was changed to “non-Christian religions” in the syllabus of 1965.

2. BACKGROUND

society? Do parents have the right to choose to give their children a religious education? What impact could/should schools, paid for with taxpayer's money, have on pupils? What beliefs and values are the smallest common denominators in a diversified society, which is increasingly characterized by pluralism?

In the RE syllabus of 1965 for upper secondary school (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1965) traces of increasing secularity and the on-going debate about religion are discernible. The subject was divided into six areas of content:

1. Analysis of the Human Condition in Modern Times
2. Ethical and moral questions
3. Christianity
4. The worldview debate
5. Non-religious Attitudes Towards Existence
6. Non-Christian religions

The subject thus dealt with the contemporary debates on religion and worldviews. Under the heading "The worldview debate" issues such as religion and the question of truth, Marx and Freud's views on religion, religion and science. Humanism, naturalism and existentialism are mentioned in the syllabus as non-religious attitudes towards existence.

In the 1960s, a number of studies showed that students perceived the subject as uninteresting. However, there was an interest in discussing existential issues at a more general level, and this was introduced into the subject in the next curriculum, which came in 1969. The subject in compulsory school was again renamed and followed the example of upper secondary school and the name was changed to *Knowledge of Religions* [Swedish: *religionskunskap*] despite strong protests from representatives of the non-conformist churches (Algotsson, 1975).²¹ Ethics and life issues were introduced as explicit content within the subject. Hartman (2000) argues that the greatest difference in the syllabus of 1969 compared to the older syllabus was the way to approach religion in educational settings. Instead of exclusively focusing on the study of religious scriptures and external religious expressions such as rites and rituals, the students' own experiences and existential concerns were emphasized and were introduced as the central starting points for teaching.

²¹ The changes in the syllabus of RE together with a decrease in teaching time in both compulsory and upper secondary school led to protests. About two million people signed petitions opposing these changes. From this wave of protest Lewi Petrus and Birger Ekstedt from the Pentecostal Church took the initiative to form a new political party, Christian Democratic Coalition, (KDS), which today has been renamed the Christian Democrats, KD.

During the 1970s, “life questions pedagogy” was a dominant approach in RE, at least in the syllabus of 1969, *Lgr 69* (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1969) and 1980, *Lgr 80* (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980). The life-question pedagogy developed in relation to research on worldviews and how people construct a personal worldview and an interpretation of the meaning of life (Bråkenhielm, 2001; Hartman 1986a, 1986b; Jeffner, 1973; Löfstedt, 2013).²² Hartman (2000) argues that through using this pedagogy, based on the students' own existential questions about life, the teachers were able to deal with the factual content of RE in a better way, as it satisfied the objectivity requirement but in an individualized way which lessened the anxiety about not being objective enough and loosened up the “objectivity cramps”, that many teachers experienced (Hartman, 2000).

Fundamental values

Christianity as a unifying set of values in the school has been replaced by the values of democracy, equality, freedom of choice, and human rights. In Swedish secularized society, the so-called *fundamental values* [Swedish: *värdegrunden*] have replaced the function previously held by Christianity as a moral compass, even though some wording related to Christianity still exists in the curricula. According to Colnerud (2004), concepts of fundamental values can be seen as “an expression of the secular school's attempt to reconnect with a moral curriculum code” (Colnerud, 2004, p. 81, own translation). So of what are comprised the fundamental values in the two most recent curricula Lpf 94 (Skolverket, 2006a) and Lgy 11 (Skolverket, 2011b)? The values society desires pupils to embrace are formulated in this way:

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching in the school should be non-denominational (Skolverket 2011b).

Especially the formulation “Christian tradition and Western humanism” has been contested and debated. Is there one single Christian tradition? And which branch of humanism does the syllabus refer to? Different traditions both within

²² Worldviews will be further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

2. BACKGROUND

Christianity and the humanist tradition could be contradictory at certain points while others are compatible (Sigurdson, 2002). Moreover, it is stated in the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) as well as in the curriculum of Lgy 11 (Skolverket 2011b) that teaching should be non-denominational. Hence, the values school should represent and impart rests on religious grounds, but has been disconnected from them. Sigurdsson (2002) chooses to interpret the requirement of non-confessional education as a requirement of inclusiveness, and not an exclusive approach to a particular tradition relating to other traditions and the common life of the community.²³ Sigurdsson (2002) argues that fundamental values as formulated in the curriculum can contribute to education by the assumption that every individual is a free, responsible human being, and has the ability to practice critical thinking. He also believes that fundamental values can add a critical distance to the nation-state and instead contribute to solidarity generated from below: “The kingdom of Sweden is not the only (or primary) significant identifier of the individual, but the traditions offer a number of ways to realize Swedish citizenship, ways that also both can challenge current customs and the prevailing legislation” (Sigurdsson, 2002, p. 147, own translation). In this way, the formulations of the curriculum can play a role in strengthening the democracy.

In RE questions of ethics and values are central and this becomes a more complex task with increasing pluralism in Swedish society: Hartman formulates the dilemma as follows: “How should we, as part of a mandatory united school system and in a society characterized by increasing pluralism, teach in and on matters of worldview character”? (Hartman, 2000, p. 238, own translation).²⁴ Franck (2008) argues that RE has the potential to be a forum for inter-cultural communicative dialogue even if this means that a number of tensions arise which teaching cannot sidestep. These tensions can be found in the very aim of the subject in the syllabus:

Teaching in the subject of religion should aim at helping students broaden, deepen and develop knowledge of religions, outlooks on life and ethical standpoints, and where applicable different interpretations of these. Knowledge and understanding of Christianity and its traditions are of special importance since this tradition has nurtured the values underpinning the

²³ Tesfahuney (1999) does not discuss fundamental values per se, but argues that education can be described in terms of a mono-cultural and ethnocentric project.

²⁴ Upper secondary school is in theory not mandatory, but 98% of all teenagers attend one of the 18 national programs, and RE is a mandatory subject. Therefore, the dilemma expressed above is as relevant in upper secondary school.

foundations of Swedish society. Teaching should take as its starting point a view of society characterized by openness regarding lifestyle, outlooks on life, differences between people, and also give students the opportunity to develop preparedness for understanding and living in a society characterized by diversity. Students should also be given the opportunity to discuss how the relationship between religion and science can be interpreted and understood, regarding, for example, questions about creation and evolution.

Teaching should lead to students developing knowledge of how people's moral attitudes can be understood on the basis of religions and outlooks on life. They should be given the opportunity to reflect on and analyse people's values and beliefs, and thus develop respect and understanding for different ways of thinking and living. Teaching should also give students the opportunity to analyse and assess how religion can relate, amongst other things, to ethnicity, gender, sexuality and socio-economic background (Skolverket, 2011a).

In the quote above, it is clear that the subject moves within the fields of tension concerning pluralism and is to handle precisely the challenges that a pluralistic society entails. While the Christian heritage and its impact on Swedish society are distinctively formulated, the teaching is to be based on the premise of openness to different views.

Summary of the history of RE in Sweden

Using Grimmit's (1987) terms, Swedish RE developed during the twentieth century to become a subject that included teaching and learning *about* religions as well as teaching and learning *from* religions, but not *in* religions. The development of the subject of RE during the 1900s can be described as progressing from a subject of both educational and fostering character as well as a subject with a societal conservation function to become a subject of individual liberation and societal analysis and mirroring. In the Lpo 94 (Skolverket, 2006b) and Lpf 94 (Skolverket, 2006a) RE can be characterized as being more focused on individual and community development as ethics and the relation between individuals and society became a more prominent theme (Olivestam, 2006).

Pupils reflect individually and in groups on what it entails to be tolerant towards different people's ways of viewing life. Pupils argue for their own way of interpreting the meaning of life with respect for the rights of others' interpretation of the meaning of life (Skolverket, 2000a, own translation).

2. BACKGROUND

In the current curriculum, Lgr 11 (Skolverket, 2011c) and Lgy 11 (Skolverket, 2011b), the personality development elements have been toned down in the syllabus for RE (Skolverket, 2011a, 2011d) in favour of facts about religion and the role of religion in society (Björlin, 2011; Selander, 2011). In summary, the development of RE in compulsory school can be described as stemming from pure teaching of the Lutheran Protestant faith to the teaching of Christianity (1919), the study of Christianity (1962), the study of religion (1969) and ending in the teaching about religion and life issues (1980, 1994). Willaime (2007) and Tomasson (2002) point out that RE in the Swedish schools is a good example of how secularization has become increasingly widespread in a country, and perhaps even contributed to it.

One question is whether RE throughout history can be regarded as one subject, or several? Goodson, Anstead, and Mangan (1998), highlight that there is a tendency to over-emphasize historical continuity. It is at least possible to perceive RE before the 1960s with its strong confessional element as essentially different from the contemporary Swedish subject of RE. The table in *Appendix 1* tries to summarize the development of the subject of RE in the grammar school that eventually evolved into the present upper secondary school.²⁵

The development of upper secondary school

It is not easy to follow the course taken of a school subject in different school types as over the years there have existed parallel and overlapping types of schools. Is it possible to talk about the same subject when the aims and contexts vary to such a great extent?

Upper secondary school [Swedish: *gymnasium*] was originally a school to which only the privileged elite had access. Upper Secondary Schools were established in the seventeenth century and originally had a close connection to the existing *cathedral schools* and later on so called *trivial schools*. The training given at these early schools resembled the university education with disputations and it was possible to take a degree in philosophy or theology. In 1649 the Swedish government stated that there should be three different school types: Trivial schools, upper secondary schools and universities. Under this reform education of priest were moved to the university. Trivial school comprised four years, and

²⁵ For a similar overview of the development of RE in the early Folk school and the compulsory school, see Hartmann, 2000. Because until 1962 there existed a “parallel school system”, some of the school forms were partly overlapping and the table should be read with this in mind.

could be extended two years with more practical and commercial-oriented training, so called *Apologist Class*. Upper secondary school had its position between the Trivial school and university. Latin and Catechism were the main subjects, but gradually more classical subjects such as Greek, Hebrew, theology, history and poetry were introduced. Modern languages, practice-oriented mathematics and science were first added into the Apologist classes, but were then gradually introduced into upper secondary schools. In 1849 Trivial schools, Apologist classes and upper secondary schools were merged into one organization, the so-called grammar schools [Swedish: *läroverk*], but the organization of the different types of schools and progression in the school system are partly unclear (Florin & Johansson, 1993; Hartman, 2005). Throughout the nineteenth century, there was a lively debate on the position of classical education in relation to more utilitarian-oriented knowledge and between the classical languages versus the modern languages. The result was a division into different programs where the students could choose a specialization between a more science-oriented program and the more classical *Bildung*-oriented program. Gradually the possibility to opt out of certain subjects increased. In 1842 the government introduced a law [Swedish: *folkskolestadgan*] (SFS 1842:19) that required each municipality and parish to offer all children education, and in 1909 a “middle school” was established, which meant a total of 6 years of compulsory schooling. With the passing of the school charter of 1905, grammar school [Swedish: *läroverk*] was divided into higher and lower schools [Swedish: *realskola*] in which the lower part was based on the first three years of elementary school. In theory this meant that it was possible for children of non-privileged families to advance in the educational system. This reform also allowed for coeducation, which meant that girls were admitted to secondary school. In 1928 it was stated that the lower part of grammar school [Swedish: *realskola*] or girls' school were entry requirements for upper secondary school studies. In 1962 the parallel school system with elementary school, secondary school and grammar schools was abolished and a 9-year comprehensive school was introduced. Vocational training had traditionally been handled by the guilds or industry, but in 1964 vocational education in so-called *facksolor* was incorporated into the general upper secondary school. Until 1994, the vocational courses were part of a two-year program while the preparatory programs for higher education comprised three or four years of study. Today, all programs comprise three years and by choosing certain courses, a vocational program might lead to eligibility for higher education, even if this possibility

2. BACKGROUND

was limited with the current curricula of Lgy11 (Skolverket 2011b). So from being a theological seminary for the elite only, upper secondary school today is attended by 98% of all students, distributed among the 18 national programs: twelve vocational programs and six preparatory programs for higher education (Arfwedson & Arfwedson, 2002; Korp, 2006; Lundgren, 1989; Lundgren, Säljö & Liberg, 2012; Richardson, 2010; Skolverket, 2011b; Thelin, 1981).

RE in comprehensive school and upper secondary school

Is there any difference between the subject of Religious Education in compulsory school compared to the subject of RE at upper secondary school? When the subject is discussed debaters rarely differentiate between the different types of schools. However, the different types of schools have had to adapt to different conditions, for example how to conduct teaching in terms of time available, and the age of the students. RE-teaching of older pupils originally had clearer links to a school whose main purpose was to provide an education for the clergy while the purpose of teaching younger children was to be educational and fostering. With the educational reform of 1905, the primary school was established for young children and secondary and upper secondary school for older children. At grammar school, university-educated teachers of different disciplines taught the different subjects. These teachers were almost exclusively male (Florin & Johansson, 1993). This contributed to the fact that the university discipline had a stronger impact on education for older students than younger ones.²⁶

Reforms of RE have caused heated public debates, whether they concerned changes in compulsory school or in upper secondary school. Still it seems that commentators in the 1960s found it somewhat easier to accept changes in upper secondary school than in primary school, for example when the name of the subject changed to Religious Education [Swedish: *religionskunskap*], or it was decided that the subject was to be non-confessional (Algotsson, 1975). The debate when writing the current RE syllabus mainly concerned whether

²⁶ Originally teachers of all levels in the school system were men. Women were admitted as teachers primarily for younger children, but were excluded from teaching boys in secondary schools until 1918. After a hard struggle led by female academics, unmarried women were allowed to be appointed to senior lecturer or lecturer at a grammar school. Classroom teachers in primary schools, preferably female teachers, were educated at teacher-training seminaries and not at the universities (Florin & Johansson, 1993).

Christianity should be mentioned explicitly, thus having a special status, or if the formulation that the subject should deal with “world religions” would be enough. Again, a distinction was not made in the debate between the subject in primary school or in upper secondary school. In the final version, Christianity is specifically mentioned both in the syllabus for comprehensive school and upper secondary school:

Through teaching in the subject of Religious Education the pupils shall be given the opportunity to develop their ability to analyse Christianity, other religions and worldviews and different interpretations and practices within these (Skolverket, 2011c, own translation).

Teaching in the course should cover the following core content: Christianity, the other world religions and different outlooks on life, their characteristics and how they are expressed by individuals and groups in the present, in Sweden and the world (Skolverket, 2011a).

The syllabi for RE in 1994 and 2011 - a comparison

As participant observations were conducted during the school-year of 2011-2012 when the curricula for Lgy 11 (including a new RE syllabus) was introduced, participant observations were made both at lessons where the teaching was to be organised according to Lpf 94 and Lgy 11, the two syllabi will here be compared. According to the National Agency of Education there are few changes in the subject between the two syllabi.

It is somewhat problematic to compare Re 1201 (Skolverket, 2000a) with the Religion 1 (Skolverket, 2011a)²⁷ as they are formulated to describe what students should be able to know in two different grading systems. Both operate within the framework of goal-related grading criteria for the different levels, but Re 1201 (Skolverket, 2000a) starts with a number of goals that students must attain and is then followed by the criteria for *Pass* [*Godkänd – G*], *Pass with Distinction* [*Väl Godkänd – VG*] and *Pass with Excellent Distinction* [*Mycket Väl*

²⁷ The curriculum consists of one general part. The present curricula (Lgy 11) have for example four main sections: core values and tasks, overall goals and guidelines, goals for all national programs and upper secondary school subjects. All subjects have a specific syllabus. In Lpf 94, the syllabus is structured based on aim, goals to strive for, the character and structure of the subject, goals the student is to achieve and assessment criteria. The mandatory course of RE in Lpf 94 is named *Knowledge of religion A* [*Religionskunskap A*] and has the code *Re 1201*. In Lgy 11, the syllabus is structured based on aim, core content and knowledge requirements for different marks. The mandatory course of RE in Lgy 11 is named *Knowledge of religion 1* [*Religionskunskap 1*] and has the code *RELREL01*.

2. BACKGROUND

godkänd- MVG]. The link between objectives and grading criteria is not entirely clear. There are, for example, content and abilities in the criteria not specified in the objectives. To obtain a VG, the student must have reached the criteria for G, and an MVG student must have reached the criteria for G and VG. The syllabus for Religion 1 (Skolverket, 2011a) has a design in which “overall aims” are stated and then it presents a list labelled “core content” which is intended to shape the content of teaching. Then the criteria for the marks E, C and A follow, where A is the highest. To get the mark D, the criteria for E have to be achieved and the “predominant” part of C criteria, and to get a B, all of the C-criteria have to be attained and most of part A requirements. The criteria do not have the character of a list, but should be the basis of an overall assessment of the pupil’s knowledge (Skolverket, 2011a). The same factual content is involved at all levels, but the pupil demonstrates that he or she can engage with the content at different levels of quality. For a comparison between the two syllabi concerning content and skills, see *Appendix 2*.

In sum, world religions and worldviews, how they are expressed and ethical models are the core of both courses. Religion 1 more clearly emphasizes the importance of religion as a social phenomenon than Re 1201, which instead emphasizes the pupil’s own reflections, understanding and position. In Re 1201 the declared objective is understanding: “The pupil presents knowledge of Christianity and other world religions and outlooks on life that enhance understanding of different lifestyles among people in the pupil’s immediate surroundings” (From the criteria for Pass, Re 1201, own translation, Skolverket, 2000a) and the student must take a personal stance. Several criteria are value-related rather than knowledge-related, for example as the pupil must respect other people’s interpretation of life to get MVG: “The pupil argues for her/his own way of interpreting the meaning of life with respect for the rights of others to their interpretation” (From the criteria for *Pass with excellent distinction*, Re 1201, my own translation, Skolverket, 2000a). In Religion 1 the pupil’s analytical skills rather than personal development are at the centre. This can be seen as a return to the syllabus of the 1960’s, with its emphasis on learning *about* rather than *from* religions. The pupils are to present interpretations, perspectives, draw valid conclusions about different relationships, but the student’s relationship to facts is not subject to assessment. However, a new theme has been introduced - faith and science, and the teaching shall include different views of the relation between religion and science in the public debate. In Re 1201 there is also a gender dimension that addresses the relationship between the sexes with

respect to religion. In Religion 1 the intersectional perspective is articulated more distinctively as religion in relation to ethnicity, and sexuality and socio-economic status are explicitly mentioned as part of the core content. The course must also include teaching about how identity is created in relation to religion and how matters relating to views on the meaning of life are made present in written sources, as well as in traditions and historical and contemporary events.

The National Agency for Education declares that the subject at upper secondary school has not undergone very large changes compared with the previous curriculum, apart from the fact that religion in contemporary society is emphasized more, and historical aspects are included in the compulsory school curriculum. There is also an intersectional perspective and new content involving faith and science.

Previous research

In the present study the social construction of the subject is perceived as an interplay between articulations of teachers and students concerning the content. Neither students nor teachers enter the classroom as a *tabula rasa* but have experiences, impressions and opinions influencing the classroom discourses. In this sense the classroom is part of society and discourses prevalent in other arenas becomes thus part of the classroom discourse. Thus this section will highlight research contributing to the understanding of how young people deal with, position themselves and manoeuvre in the religious pluralistic landscape. As mentioned in the introduction, there are few studies focusing on the classroom of RE which makes it even more important to elucidate what we do know about this field in order to develop knowledge within the field of Religious Education *didaktik* and a systematic review of classroom research within RE has been undertaken.

The religious landscape

How do young people in today's society perceive and talk about religion? How do migration, globalization and secularization influence young peoples' attitudes to religion? This study's focus is to describe the school subject of RE, and previous sections pointed to the fact that subjects must be understood in relation to their historical, political, social and religious contexts. This section aims to describe some aspects of the religious landscape and young people's perceptions and attitudes towards religion based on research in the field that

2. BACKGROUND

constitutes the context of RE. In descriptions of religiosity in the Western world, not least in Sweden, secularization is a concept that has been used in order to describe the changes society has undergone. However, the concept is contested and scholars disagree on what it means and whether it is a useful concept to describe and understand religiosity in contemporary society. Therefore I begin this section with a brief summary of different perspectives on the concept of secularity before I go into research concerning the attitudes of young people towards religion.

Secularity and pluralism

Sweden is often referred to as one of the most secularized countries in the world not least by Swedes themselves (af Burén, 2015; Thurfjell, 2015; Zuckerman, 2009). In the academic debate on secularity it is emphasized that secularity can mean slightly different things. In sum, secularity can be characterized as a transformation process in which secular institutions are increasingly taking over previously religiously dominated tasks such as education, healthcare and social security. It can also be described as a decline in religious beliefs and religiously motivated acts and a separation of religion from the public sphere into the private (Cassanova, 2003; Dobbelaire, 2009; Taylor, 2007). In this sense, the expansion of the welfare state, where the state stands as the patron of citizen security can be seen as one major cause of secularization. In a secular society religion and politics are separated and scientific knowledge is considered the only source of valid knowledge. According to the secular rationale, people should manage their lives based on rational principles (Davie, 2007).

Bruce (1996) recognizes individualism to be of crucial importance to the secularization process. He sees the Lutheran Reformation as the starting point for increased rationality and individualism, which undermined the collective religious beliefs. Other studies argue that secularity does not mean that religion disappears, but rather that it reduces the influence of religious thinking, religious practices and religious institutions in society at large, i.e. the role of religion is diminishing (Demerath III, 2007). In trying to understand what aspects have changed, Hervieu-Léger (2000) highlights the significance of language, as she describes religion as “chains of memories” that relate the individual to traditions. She argues that the quest for meaning has not decreased, but that secularization has entailed a breakage of the chain of collective memory due to modernity, fragmentation and individualization. Secularization thus involves a

kind of collective loss of memory where fewer and fewer individuals share the same interpretation of symbols and language to talk about religious phenomena.

Others emphasize the importance of pluralism²⁸ to understand secularization (Berger, 1969; Taylor, 2007). Berger (1969) coined the phrase “the sacred canopy”. This refers to the systems of meaning that protect individuals by providing context and meaning. In a secular society competing meaning systems emerge, and the plurality of meaning-systems in itself contributes to secularization. Davie (2007) states that although pluralism can obviously have different consequences, pluralism affects how we think at a fundamental level. In a society where there are no established truths, individuals must make their own decisions about how to relate to different traditions. Unlike in a non-pluralistic society (if there ever was such a thing?), all people have to choose and this could of course mean that some opt out of religion as their sacred canopy. Taylor (2007) underlines the multitude and plurality of choices as one of the most crucial and important aspect of secularity: “The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (Taylor, 2007, p. 3). No matter what aspects of secularization one chooses to emphasize, secularization affects what to define as religious and not (Asad, Brown, Butler & Mahmood, 2013).

In recent times the concept “postsecular” has been coined in order to describe changes in contemporary society where the role and function of religion in the public sphere has been transformed, but not in the way that the enlightenment and modernistic theories of secularisation expected. To refute and nuance theories of secularisation postsecularism is used to point to the empirical fact that religions have not disappeared, neither as a private interpretation of the meaning of life, nor in the public realm as predicted by secularisation theorists. The expression “the new visibility of religion” seems to be used interchangeably to grasp the social and political changes in the wake of increasing globalisation, migration and thus growing diversity within societies

²⁸ Pluralism can be used as a descriptive concept, trying to grasp varieties in background and views in various contexts. The concept can also be used normatively and thus associate pluralism with positive values attributed to religious diversity (cf. Beckford, 2014; Skeie, 2002). A premise in this thesis is that the contemporary world is characterized by increasing pluralism in the sense that different views and worldviews, religious as well as non-religious, coexist within society, and the concept is thus used descriptively.

2. BACKGROUND

and the development of media through which attention in the last decades is brought to religion as a social and political phenomenon. Postsecularism is also used to mark the development of numerous parallel interpretations, which might include a religious/spiritual dimension or not – it is up to the individual to decide and thus gives way to a certain degree of relativism. Habermas uses the concept in a normative way and sees mutual recognition between religious and non-religious individuals as a prerequisite for handling differences and diversity in a pluralistic society (Carlsson & Thalén, 2015). Sigurdson (2009) perceives the postsecular turn as a change in how to understand the present where the religious and the secular can't be separated but constitute a hybrid.

Both aspects of secularity, postsecularity and pluralism might be possible to prove or rebut empirically, but they nevertheless all comprise imaginaries of the contemporary and thus influence the conversation about religion(s) and the secular in the RE-classroom.

Youths, secularization, pluralism and individualism

How do teenagers manoeuvre in this pluralistic secularized landscape? Here studies concerning religion and youth from Europe and the USA will be presented. Knauth, Jozsa, Bertram-Troost & Ipgrave (2008)²⁹ discern two opposing trends – on the one hand, secularization is spreading in the sense that religion is becoming less socially significant. On the other hand, there are signs that participation in religious rites such as church services in Pentecostal churches in England are on the increase. There are findings suggesting that religion is becoming more privatized. For example, in a study of Russian adolescents, only 2% reported that they attended religious services, but 50% believed in God (Bertram-Troost, Ipgrave, Jozsa & Knauth, 2008). This can be seen as evidence that Davie (2007) is right when she says that the religious change that took place during the 1900s can be described as people believing without belonging to a specific group. The main conclusion from their study is that the pluralism as a societal phenomenon really has won acceptance in the new generation and there is a great awareness that there are a large number of

²⁹ This study done by Knauth et al. (ed.) (2008) was part of the REDCo-project: *Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries (REDCo)*, which was an EU-funded project between 2006-2009, aimed to increase knowledge about religion in the educational sector. Participating countries were Germany, Spain, Norway, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Russia and England (REDCo, 2013).

competing religions and conceptions of reality (Bertram-Troost et al., 2008; Davie, 2007).

Obviously an enormous variation of ideas appear within a generation - there are adolescents to whom religion is a central part of their worldview that characterizes their daily lives, and there are young people for whom religion plays no role whatsoever, and all varieties in between these positions. Madge et al. (2013) classified attitudes of young people towards religion into four categories: *Strict Adherents* to whom religion and tradition were central to their lives; *Flexible Adherents* to whom faith was important, but who adapted beliefs and practices in relation to the circumstances and also prioritized other things in life; *Pragmatists* who saw religion as important but did not strongly identify with their faith; *Bystanders* for whom religion was unimportant. But regardless of category it was crucial to emphasize that religiosity was an expression of personal agency and an active personal choice. Some young people in the Knauth et al. (2008) study described religion in a personal subjective way, while others saw it more as a social phenomenon. Even if they belonged to the latter category, however, they perceived religion as a way of viewing life that they either embraced or were critical towards. To have a personal faith, a faith in God, ideas about life after death, paradise, salvation, and the belief that the world was created by a divine force, were perceived as relevant issues by the young people in the study, and many also reported that they had had their own religious experiences. Many stated that religion gave them comfort, support, strength, and moral guidance to distinguish between good and evil. Religion offered a sense of belonging, the feeling that they were part of a larger context, and a sense of fellowship and group affiliation. But there was also a large group of young people who stated that religion did not play any role in their lives (Knauth et al., 2008). Demographic changes related to migration and increasing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity influence how young people relate to and identify with religious traditions.

The image of a pluralistic Europe where a large group of the teenagers can be described as secular was confirmed in the quantitative REDCo study (Valk, Bertram-Troost, Friederici & Béraud, 2009). Most secular is Estonia, where only 15% describe themselves as believers, while almost two thirds in Germany and Spain consider themselves believers. Between 10-20% of young people in the study described themselves as Muslims, while other religious affiliations, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, New Age, etc. are too small to be evident statistically. Basically the qualitative data that emerged in the previous study is

2. BACKGROUND

confirmed in a quantitative study (Valk et al., 2009). The facts that many young people lack experience of religious practice and that the family is the most important source of knowledge and experience of religion were confirmed. It was also shown that most teenagers do not talk about religion very often. The question of whether they have a religious identity or not is not easy to answer as this concept has different meanings. It is clear that organized religion does not appear to be particularly attractive in the eyes of young people, but this rejection of religion does not necessarily entail a clear atheistic stance. Between 30-40 per cent of the teenagers believed there is a higher power that in different ways has control over various events. Many believe that religion has played an important role in history, and some identify themselves as part of a Christian culture. For one group, religion is very important to their everyday lives, and this group is dominated by Muslims and charismatic Christians (Valk et al., 2009).

Individualism and religion as a personal, active choice is stressed in several studies. Flory and Miller (2010) conducted an interview study in an American context and discerned a number of characteristic features of post-boomers' positions in relation to religion (the age group which is currently around 30-40 years old). They perceive religion as a choice, not an imperative. Religious labels are not particularly important for this group and a large majority are fairly tolerant of other beliefs and appreciate religious pluralism. The post-boomers take a sceptical stance towards external religious authorities and hierarchies and see religiosity less as a fixed set of beliefs than a search for religious experiences and higher values. The central concerns are authenticity, honesty and openness, rather than religious authorities. They have no problem with being eclectic in religious terms, and many create their own hybrid of religious beliefs. The post-boomers want to change the world, and highlight that religion must denounce and work against injustice and inequality. They are truly postmodernist and take a sceptical stance towards all claims to universal, eternal truths, as everything depends on the perspective from which something is described.

Family, friends and media –influences on young people's religious beliefs

The factor that has the greatest impact on young people's religiosity is the family – if the family is religious, the likelihood that a young person identifies as a believer in any sense is much larger than if the family is non-religious (Bertram-Troost et al., 2008; Madge et al., 2013). Day (2011) conducted a study in the British context and concludes that social affiliation, not religion, is central for

meaning, morality and “transcendence”, even to young people who identify as Christians. Being Christian in Day’s (2011) study is more of an ethnic identification than a religious one. School (and not only RE), friends and media are other influential factors. The non-religious young people build their understanding of religion on mass media and to some extent school education. That such a large group of young people in Sweden do not have any personal experience of what religion can mean, has implications for how young people understand the concept of religion and related issues (Sjöborg, 2012; Torstenson-Ed, 2003).

Rejection of religion can also be seen as a question of the younger generation questioning the hegemonic older generation. Kanuth et al. (2008) conclude that young people describe their religious/non-religious affiliation not only as a repudiation of their parents' beliefs, but also in terms of representing a new generation that rejects out-dated religious beliefs and religious oppression. Friends and youth culture are more important for young people's opinions than for previous generations. In several countries in the REDCo-study it was found that religion is not something young people talk about and their social environment of friends is characterized by a sceptical approach towards religious ideas - to be religious is simply not cool and not associated with status. It is also possible to discern a view of religion as something you can consume or abstain from if you want, as you might turn to God, for example during life crises.

Islam comes across as a special case among religions in several studies, and the image of Islam and Muslims often appears one-dimensional. In their research on the complexity and variability of Islam, Otterbeck and Hallin (2010) illustrate the great variation in interpretations and attitudes, as well as the importance religion has to a group of young adult Muslims in Sweden and Denmark. In a study carried out in Norway, von der Lippe (2011) shows that young people position themselves in relation to discourses of religion and diversity which include themes such as: immigration as frightening, immigration leading to increased crime, the Islamization of society, the Muslim terrorist, Islam and Muslims as a homogenous group, and the norm of Norwegians being white. These discourses influence perceptions of religion in general and Islam in particular, regardless of whether the young person in the study was a Muslim or not. One of many interesting differences between Christians and Muslims was that Christians often played down their Christian identity in secular contexts, mentioning that they were afraid of being teased and many of the

2. BACKGROUND

Christians described themselves as ambivalent in their Christian identity. They used, for example, expressions such as “jiggle Christian”, “Christian now and then”, “very light Christian”, “occasional Christian”, “a bit Christian”. Being a Muslim, which for many believers encompasses visible markers such as clothing and food rules, was not described in the same ambivalent terms, even though Islam in many communities has strong negative associations. Young people with experience of migration (self or parents) and who belonged to a minority group, to a greater extent expressed that religion was important in their lives (Ipgrave & Bertram Troost, 2008).

In a European comparison there are significant differences in experience between different countries, but also within the countries in terms of experience of heterogeneity and pluralism (cultural, ethnic, religious, etc.) (Jozsa & Friederici, 2008). However, a clear dichotomy between believers and non-believers is found in all countries. Those who discuss religion are often those who themselves have a faith - but this also depends on the context in which they live and if their friends share their interest in religious matters. Students who attend schools where different religions are represented discuss religion to a greater extent than students in more homogeneous schools, but there must be a “critical mass” represented for the discussion to take place. Reasons for students not to discuss issues related to religion were that they thought it was boring, irrelevant, that they did not believe in God or did not believe that they are helped in their lives through religion. Other reasons may be that it was thought of as uncool, fear of being teased, or that religion is a sensitive issue and can activate conflicts. In Spain, religion was perceived as a “girly” topic, which is why guys rarely discussed the issue. In Estonia and Russia young people say they do not discuss the issue because they did not know much about religion, which can be a legacy from the socialist era. Young people across Europe perceive religion as a private matter - in France the school based on the principle of *laïcité* is perceived a public place, which is why religion should not be discussed there. Young believers in France often discuss religion with others who share their faith. These young people talk about specific matters of faith, while non-believing young people (if they talk about religion) to a greater extent take up issues identified in the media such as fundamentalism, terrorism, and the papal elections. In Russia and Estonia more questions have the nature of philosophical and existential reasoning (Jozsa & Friederici, 2008).

A large group of adolescents in the REDCo-study (Kanuth et al., 2008) lack personal religious experience, and it is clear that young people understood the

subject very differently. When describing their experiences of religion and related matters the positive experience dominated and often involved taking part in religious ceremonies or meeting a believer. The negative experience included experiences such as forced participation in a boring church service, but more often opinions were of a more general kind with reference to media. It is interesting that the positive attitudes are based on personal experiences, while negative attitudes have a more general and abstract character.

Tolerance

The hypothesis that religious people are less tolerant and less open to dialogue than non-believers was tested but not confirmed in the REDCO quantitative study (Valk et al., 2009). On the contrary, the answers indicate that young believers are more tolerant and interested in dialogue with people of different faiths. Tolerance is something that was perceived as favourable by all, both believers and non-believers. Also, the reason not to discuss religious issues might not be intolerance – it is possibly due to the possibility that if one lacks a personal faith one might not have enough knowledge or language to talk about these issues. Young believers expressed that they had great interest in discussing religious matters (Valk et al., 2009). Madge et al. (2013) argue that the discourse of tolerance and respect for liberal individualism that they found in their study, serves as a unifying “glue” of society in a durkheimian sense.

Many express that they want to learn what religion means (learning *about* religion). However, a majority do not want to receive teaching about religion, at least not in school. Based on students' responses, it is difficult to determine if the school subject of RE contributed to paving the way for diversity, tolerance and dialogue, which to a great extent depends on the fact that teaching is designed so differently in the different countries. An interesting result from Germany is that it does not seem to be the teaching per se that had the greatest influence on tolerance, but the experience of personal contacts and meeting people from different backgrounds in the classroom that matters most. A segregated society and not least a segregated school-system, where people of different backgrounds are separated and never interact, has a crucial, negative impact on the development of tolerance and respect (Valk et al., 2009).

When comparing the REDCOo-countries Béraud (2009) concludes that individuals who belong to a religious minority, for example Muslims or charismatic Christians in France, can be described as being the most openly positive towards diversity and dialogue. Dialogue is seen positively by everyone,

2. BACKGROUND

but many believe that it is not enough to guarantee a peaceful coexistence. When students were asked about what is needed for a peaceful coexistence, knowledge tops the list followed by common interests, having a joint project, doing things together and personal contacts. Many express a vision and ideals of tolerance, but at the same time many young people never meet people of different religious, cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, which means that their ideals are not tested in practice (Valk et al., 2009).

An overwhelming majority of respondents believe that it is possible to live together in peaceful coexistence despite belonging to different ethnic and religious groups (Béraud, 2009). The keywords are described as tolerance and respect. It is possible to discern a different attitude depending on whether you are discussing pluralism in macro-, mezzo- or micro-level; on an abstract macro level almost all people are positive. At the mezzo-level, it appears that certain groups, such as “extremists” and some specific religious practices are perceived as obstacles to a peaceful coexistence. On the individual micro level there are many concrete examples showing that it is possible and rewarding to live in a pluralistic society, and they mention friends, neighbours, classmates, and trips to foreign places. When it comes to the most private, however, in the form of inter-religious marriages, many people believe that it is too difficult. Possible conflicts are identified between different religious groups, not between religious and non-religious people. Religious pluralism is seen as positive in the sense that everyone has an opportunity to choose their own life. The prerequisite for pluralism is sharing some basic values such as tolerance and mutual respect (Jozsa & Friederici, 2008).

Studies from the Swedish context are consistent with European and American research. Risenfors (2011) suggests that the discourse of tolerance and the importance of respecting other people's beliefs, that many young people adhere to in theory, may conceal a great deal of disinterest and indifference - they are simply not very curious about other people's beliefs. She describes these attitudes as discourses of tolerance and consensus. The tolerance discourse plays the role of a hegemonic discourse in which differences are downplayed, and the pupils express an endeavour to reach consensus.

A distant relation - Swedish youth and religion

The image emerging in research about the relationship between Swedish youth and religion does not differ to a very large extent from the picture above. In both quantitative (Lövheim & Bromander, 2012; Sjöborg, 2012) and qualitative

studies (von Brömssen, 2003, 2009, 2012; Risenfors, 2011) of how young people view religion, a picture of an essentially individualized and privatized religiosity emerges. The concept of religion has partially been emptied of its traditional content. In the school context, talk about religion is more about other people and their religions. Religion is not important in many young people's lives, compared to other things (Lövheim & Bromander, 2012), and being religious is not regarded as especially “cool” and is even considered out-dated (von Brömssen, 2009, 2012). In interviews about meaning making with young adults Gustavsson (2013) also concludes that individualism and the personal life-project are central in the minds of her interviewees. She distinguishes a realist, a spiritual and what she calls “a third” position in relation to existential questions where the third position oscillates between a religious and a non-religious interpretation of the meaning of life. Also af Burén (2015) points to the fact that a large group cannot be described as either religious or secular, but encompass positions that go beyond this binary categorization and embrace seemingly contradictory views such as being partly Buddhist, Christian, atheist or something else simultaneously. She uses the word “semi-secular” to describe this position.

A clear majority (60%) of the Swedish young people define themselves as non-religious, 32% see themselves as part of a Christian tradition, and 6% as part of the Muslim tradition (Lövheim & Bromander, 2012; Sjöborg, 2012). There is a sharp distinction between how believers of different affiliations look upon religion compared to those who don't perceive themselves as believers. Migration and ethnicity seems to be an important factor in understanding the differences in how young people think and perceive religion. von Brömssens (2003) study highlights the ethnification of religion in the talk of teenagers. Religion was attributed to the “Ethnic Other” by pupils born in Sweden, who had parents born in Sweden, while they mainly associated being Swedish with having no religion. To pupils born outside Sweden or with a parent born outside Sweden, religion to a higher degree entailed part of their identity. These imaginaries in these different groups contributed to a situation in school where pupils with different backgrounds, self-perceptions and views of religion “met without meeting” and reinforced prejudices and stereotypical images of “the Other”. Sjöborgs (2012) quantitative study points in the same direction and shows that ethnicity, religion, gender but even class-background (in terms of parents educational background and program at upper secondary school) affected how students related to the subject of RE. Those who choose to define

2. BACKGROUND

themselves as religious emphasize that this is a result of their own conscious and active choice and the importance of positioning themselves in this way. In Sjöborg's (2012) study, religiosity of "the Other" is however to a larger extent described as an expression of culture, tradition or oppression.

In the study by von Brömssen (2012) differences in approaches to religion emerge between different schools, but also between different educational programs in upper secondary school. For students who did not position themselves as believers, religion was talked about as a private matter that was neither important nor particularly "cool". If religion was discussed, it was rather as a cultural phenomenon, which in itself could help the individual to endure, but could also be dangerous at a group and societal level and be a source of conflict and war. Students argued that RE contributed to their knowledge so that they were better able to understand and criticize religions. In the Science programme [Swedish: *Naturvetenskapsprogrammet*], issues of faith and science were often discussed and the scientific discourse was completely hegemonic. Students who held a different opinion in these matters didn't express this in class for fear of getting lower marks. Students in the Nursing programme [Swedish: *Omvårdnadsprogrammet*] discussed religion from a somewhat different perspective, which was more related to issues of cultural encounters and ethical dilemmas in health care.

To summarize this section – in both Swedish, European and American research a context emerges where many youths live in a pluralistic context and encounter people of different background on a daily basis. Religion is, however, seldom the topic of discussion among youths, and when religion is discussed in school the research seems to indicate that it is generally constructed in a distanced way, as something associated with "the Other". Religion has become one of many choices, not something unquestionable. Religions appear in many contexts as out-dated, and individualism seems to be an overriding principle and value. Different discourses of religion dwell side by side and some concepts such as religion and tolerance seem to be floating signifiers that have different meaning in different contexts and groups. This study does not focus on the views of young people *per se* but on the social construction of RE in the classroom. The subject is, however, seen as constructed in the classroom in the interplay between students, teachers and content because the perceptions of students also affect the construction of the subject.

Classroom Research

As mentioned earlier, research on Religious Education comprises several scientific fields and has its roots in both educational science and fields concerning aspects of school subjects and subject-matter *didaktik* but also the disciplines of religious studies and theology. Classroom research has undergone various phases and trends with various areas of focus, methods and theories. In overviews of educational research (cf. Gordon, Holland & Lahelma 2007; LeCompte, 2009; Sahlström, 2008) the early classroom research is described as mainly focused on external behaviour dominated by quantitative approaches. In the last few decades, qualitative approaches that seek to contextualize learning have gained more influence. Themes that have dominated classroom research have been, for example, analyses of classroom rules for turn-taking (Initiation-Response-Evaluation, IRE), who dominates class room conversation, and students' (lack of) influence in the classroom. More sociologically and ethnographically inspired research has focused on various aspects of gender, class and power, and the classroom as an arena to maintain power structures in society. International as well as Swedish research in educational science seems to move towards various aspects of learning and to be more oriented towards research aimed at developing the classroom practice and promote students' learning (The Swedish Research Council, 2014). When it comes to subject-related classroom studies focusing on the content of subjects and learning, studies on language learning, mathematics and science dominate (Sahlström, 2008). Classroom studies in other subjects, such as RE, are in comparison extremely few (Johnsson Harrie, 2011; Osbeck, 2006, 2012).

Religious Education and Classroom - a systematic review*

In order to somehow gain an overview of international research and thus the current state of knowledge related to RE, with a special focus on research concerning the classroom practice, I will here present the results from a systematic review³⁰ of recent research in the field.³¹

³⁰ In the wake of the evidence-movement, systematic reviews of research are becoming more frequent even in science education, although this is debated within the field (cf. Bohlin, 2010; Hammersley, 2007; Levinsson, 2013; Moon, Butcher & Bird, 2000). The present overview has followed the guidelines outlined in Eriksson Barajas, Forsberg, & Wengström (2013).

³¹ One disadvantage with this kind of procedure, however, is that material published in the form of books is not included why I want to account for themes in some central RE classroom studies from the European and Nordic context: Within the framework of the REDCo-project classroom studies with the aim of investigating what facilitates and obstructs dialogue in the classrooms (ter Avest,

2. BACKGROUND

The words *Religious Education* and *Classroom** were used in the *EBSCOhost* search engine that comprises multiple databases.³² Of the 238 articles 129 concerned education in primary and secondary schools. Almost half of the articles (n=109) were excluded because they dealt with, for example, higher education or purely religious education by religious institutions outside the compulsory school system. However, the remaining 129 articles were both from confessional and non-confessional contexts, as the term Religious Education is used for different formations of the subject. Upon perusal of the abstracts, 62 articles were assessed to be written based on a confessional RE basis, 52 articles treated non-confessional and non-denominational RE and 15 just discussed the issue of confessional education and dealt thus with both forms of RE. Here is also the geographical spread and the contributions are largely characterized by the conditions prevailing in the different countries for the school subject of RE. An example of this is that most of the contributions from the UK (n=28), where the non-confessional education dominates the publicly funded school system, are articles referred to empirical material that involved schools that offered non-confessional instruction (n=22), three that offered confessional instruction, and three that offered neither. The 23 contributions from the United States, where RE does not exist as a separate school subject in publicly funded schools, 17 articles were categorized as confessional and these articles were primarily based upon empirical material from religious schools. Moreover, articles from European countries dominated, but all continents were represented.

Jozsa, Knauth, Rosón & Skeie, 2009). Pluralism, individualism and the claim that the national imaginary is related to Christianity even if one does not perceive oneself as religious, seem to be two recurring themes (cf. Anker, 2011; Buchardt, 2008; Eriksen, 2010; Klingenberg, 2005; von der Lippe, 2009). Berglund's (2009) classroom study is rare within the field of RE in that it focuses on the content of teaching. Her study, however, concerns Islamic Religious Education (IRE) taught at confessional Muslim schools.

³² The databases ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, Academic Search Elite, ERIC, Teacher Reference Centre and Education Research Complete were selected. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles available in full text in English published in the last 10 years (2004-2014). The search resulted in 373 hits: Education Research Complete (n=163), ERIC (n=118) Academic Search Elite (n=79) ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials (n=13). When duplicates were removed 238 articles remained. The thesaurus terms that dominated were: Religious Education (n=147) Education (n=43) freebies (n=39) Christian Education (n=36) curricula (courses of study) (n=29) learning (n=29).

Content analysis of abstracts

One result of the review of the 129 abstracts is that a clear majority of the articles in different ways involve issues of RE in relation to societal religious diversity and pluralism. How can teachers relate to and handle a pluralistic society and classrooms that in different ways are characterized by diversity? (See for example, Baumfield, 2007; Bender-Szymanski, 2012; Everington, 2014; Everington, ter Avest, Bakker, & van der Want, 2011). How does this affect the choice of teaching methods, selection of material? (ter Avest & Bakker, 2009; Berglund, 2011; Green & Oldendorf, 2005; Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, 2013; Rissanen, 2012). How is the multi-religious, pluralistic society mirrored in curricula and the social construction of RE as a subject? (Alberts, 2010; Boeve, 2012; Cardinal, 2009; Fakirani, 2013; Mueller, 2005; Pässe & Willox, 2009)? What are students' experiences of diversity or belonging to a minority? (Moulin, 2011, 2015; Sjöborg, 2012; Thanissaro, 2011a, 2011b; Zilliacus & Holm, 2013). It is interesting to note that the question of how schools should respond to and manage diversity is just as relevant regardless of whether the article is written based on confessional or non-confessional RE. Conversely, the solutions vary, depending on different social, national, and institutional conditions. Bråten (2013), through document analysis, observations, and interviews, designed a comparative model to analyse the reason for the responses to the challenges being different in different countries.

Close reading classroom observations

As this thesis focuses on the design of Religious Education in the classroom, in this overview I will primarily focus research on classroom observations. It's worth noting that only 32 of the articles can be described as empirical classroom studies - a large number of articles discuss classroom practice, how the subject ought to be designed and taught, aspects that teachers should consider and bring into the classroom, different models for education etc. In general, a large number of these recommendations are merely opinions and theoretical discussions, not recommendations based on findings from empirical studies.

With respect to the empirical studies of religious education in primary and secondary education - what are they about and what can we learn from these studies? Of the 129 articles, 32 were empirical studies of classroom environments in Comprehensive Schools. Two major themes were discernible – and they are connected – but they focus on different aspects of RE in the classroom practice. One theme could be described as teaching and learning in

2. BACKGROUND

RE. The other theme can be described as religious education as a tool for gaining societal cohesion. The result of the content analyses of the 32 empirical classrooms-studies will be structured along the content oriented themes of *Learning, Meaning, Dialogue, Identity* and *Implications of confessional/ non-confessional models of RE*.

Learning

In the discussion regarding what the subject of RE is, should be, and should not be, the concepts of learning *in* religion, learning *from* religion and learning *about* religion recur.³³ Teece (2010) analyses a number of teaching sequences, and argues that the concept of “learning from religion” that is held up high in official documents in the UK is problematic: What is it to be taught? How? How do we know what someone learned? Is it learning from religion, a specific religion or religions in general? What do we mean by religion, as a general concept?

The school is a complex context - on the one hand, the overall aim of education is that the students should learn, reflect, develop and reach their full potential, to become whole beings persons and be able to be active citizens. On the other hand society, partly through laws and curricula, but not least through different forms of summative assessment, governs what objective every individual must reach and requires teachers to measure and assess whether the students reach these objectives. This may be in conflict with the overall goal of education. This dilemma is addressed by Dinama (2010), who analyses the implementation of a multi-faith curriculum in Botswana. In the classroom practice, the task of getting the students to pass the national exams rather than getting them to reflect and participate in dialogue, became the priority as the tests exclusively focused on facts, even though the overall aim of the curriculum was to promote values such as independence, freedom, tolerance, and understanding. A similar observation is made by van Eersel, Hermans and Slegers (2010) and Conroy, Lundie and Baumfield (2012). In an action research project aiming to improve the classroom practice through the use of self-assessment and reflection upon learning as a tool for learning, Fancourt (2010) shows how students' meta-reflections on learning can be used as a resource in teaching. O'Grady (2010) argues that reflection and learning cannot be separated, they presuppose each other. Reflexivity of position and practice is

³³ Cf. Grimmitt (1987).

also highlighted as absolutely central to professionalism in the teaching profession (Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004; White, 2010). From a German confessional context Heil and Ziebertz (2004) discuss the conditions for the RE-teaching profession. They argue that society is characterized by pluralism and that individuals in varying degrees relate to the Christian content because teachers need to assume an abductive approach where the teacher constantly oscillates between what should be taught, students' understanding, and modification or transformation of Christianity in order to make teaching relevant and effective.

What is being taught in the classroom and what ought to be taught? These issues are addressed in the articles, but usually the actual content is not subject to analysis, with the exception of Naeslund (2009) who discusses what invited representatives of different communities actually say during Religious Education classes. Most articles provide references to specific subject matter, but they emphasise more general themes and discuss for example the notion that students should have the opportunity to gain some perspective on their own learning (Heil & Ziebertz, 2004) and develop an understanding for other ways of thinking (cf. Watson, 2011).

Not just what the teaching was about but also *how* teachers and students talked in the classroom affects the learning of RE. The study done by Osbeck and Lied (2011) focuses on learning in RE and how it is related to hegemonic speech genres in the RE-classroom. They highlight two dimensions in the classroom discourse as principally significant: respectful or mocking valuation of religion, and whether the boundaries of religions and beliefs are defined as fixed or open. The discourses in the classroom affected what it was possible to learn.

Dialogue

Dialogue and various aspects and models of dialogue pedagogy were highlighted in several studies (Castelli, 2012; Osbeck & Lied, 2011; Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004; van Eersel et al., 2010; Watson, 2011). Bakhtin and reasoning about the importance of dialogue for learning and human interaction, constitute the theoretical inspiration for several of these studies. Partly, dialogue is examined in relation to how teachers use dialogue as a pedagogical tool with a didactic, educational science focus (Schihalejev, 2009; van Eersel et al., 2010). Schihalejev (2009) describes factors such as teaching methods, how teachers formulate questions and the atmosphere in the classroom as important to

2. BACKGROUND

facilitate or obstruct dialogue. Partly dialogue in RE is discussed as a way to contribute to positive social development and social cohesion (Castelli, 2012; Watson, 2011). Watson (2011) builds on theories of interfaith-dialogue and classroom dialogue as a basis for the development of children's spirituality. Based on results from empirical classroom studies she sees dialogue as a possible way to create social cohesion. Castelli (2012) argues that dialogue is developing an understanding of others, but also pupils' ability to articulate their own belief system, which is of central importance in a society where we as human beings constantly encounter different beliefs, religious and secular.

Meaning

The concept of sense and meaning is emphasized as central to the RE in several of the articles. Some feature learning as synonymous to meaning-making (Eke, Lee, & Clough, 2005; Osbeck & Lied, 2011) and Lehmann (2008) describes discourse in RE and the English classroom as “situated meanings”. The teacher's work is thus to assist the students' construction of meaning. Conroy et al. (2012) describe the discourse that shaped the goals of RE, implying that the search for truth has been replaced by the search for meaning. They argue that the subject of RE (in England) contains complex and conflicting objectives, which means that students perceive the subject as vague and unimportant. One way to resolve the problem of meaning in non-confessional RE is, according to Lundie and Conroy (2012), to organise instruction around contested issues and even more important, to organize teaching based on student's experiences and perceptions. In both confessional and non-confessional RE the phrase “spiritual education” occurs. The term is defined in slightly different ways, but Hyde (2006) argues that spiritual education concerns the notion that education should convey a sense of fellowship, connectedness with the self, with others, and with the transcendent universe.³⁴

Identity

Several studies discuss identification and positioning. Buchardt (2010) displays how Muslim-ness is constructed in the Danish RE [Danish: *Kristendomskundskap* i.e. Knowledge of Christianity] that ought to be non-denominational and non-confessional. In the classroom Danishness is equated with Christianity. Muslim

³⁴ There are different definitions of Spiritual Education, but the concept usually refers to education as meaning-making, to see the whole human being in every pupil. “Spirituality” in this educational context refers to the relational dimension of being or relational consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006).

and Danish become incompatible positions. This is in clear contrast to the Finish Muslim RE teacher in Rissanen's (2013) study who emphasizes that one can be both Finish and Muslim and that there is no conflict between these identities, or the Swedish Muslim teachers in Berglund's (2011)³⁵ study who want to emphasize that there is no contradiction between science and religion, between a secular or religious worldview but that it is possible to embrace both. Berglund (2011) describes it as “a struggle of space”: First, there is an internal struggle for precedence about which interpretation of the religion is valid, but also an external struggle in order to make their voice heard in the community. Lehmann (2008), who compares English class instruction and the teaching of religion (Humash-classes) in an orthodox Jewish secondary school, also notes that teachers expect different identities in the various subjects. In the Humash-class, there is an assumption of a “we”, that is “we Jews”, while more and different identities occurred in English class. In a German project with cooperative RE where Catholic and Protestant teachers worked together also talk of “us” and “them” occurred: “We do not do that in our church” and “We pray to the saints; they don’t” (Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004). Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013) point to the way Irish schools occupy an unreflective attitude when it comes to issues of race, culture and religion. The Irish self-image includes a notion that the Irish society is Catholic, white and Gaelic, which is a description that can be problematized and nuanced as it is no longer correct, and also prevents individuals from gaining access to their rights of freedom of religion. Van Eersel et al. (2010) discusses how to use just the term “other” as a tool for learning - we are all “other” in relation to something else and learning is about being able to take different perspectives and problematize our own views. Van Eersel et al. (2010) shows that teachers often stop at the first step of just describing difference and that much of the time used for instruction will be about the facts and to get students to deliver the “right answer”, not to analyse similarities and differences in perceptions.

Implications of confessional/ non-confessional models of RE

In many countries RE means dividing students into different groups based on denominational affiliation. A number of the contributions discuss the implications of this approach. Is divided or segregated RE divisive or unifying?

³⁵ Both Rissanen (2013) and Berglund (2011) made observations on Islam Religious Education (IRE).

2. BACKGROUND

Cardinal (2009) has compared the Muslim and Christian RE in Syria.³⁶ Students are divided on the basis of religion but all Christians and all Muslims study together, regardless of denomination, so in that sense the curriculum is ecumenical. And there are also many similarities between the different courses in terms of structure and themes; tolerance, human rights, citizenship, women's rights, religious pluralism, national unity. In the classrooms there are also many similarities in the way teaching is carried out. Cardinal (2009) argues that the confessional system can be as unifying as the non-confessional and integrative RE - the purpose is to create dialogue and mutual understanding between different religious groups. RE in Syria is according to Cardinal (2009) an attempt to find a balance among religious autonomy for different groups but would implement a sense of belonging to the same nation. Nationalism is emphasized in both Muslim and Christian RE as the unifying glue. Rissanen (2013) as well as Zilliacus and Holm (2013) touch upon the same discussion but base their results on empirical findings from the Finnish context. In Finland there are 13 different types of RE and the Christians are divided into Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others. Although the students are divided based on religious affiliation the subject is characterized as non-confessional as there occur no religious practices such as praying in the classroom, but the subject aims at strengthening the religious identity. It appears that the students appreciate the opportunity to meet others who share their faith, but there is also a downside to differentiating the students - they want to be like everyone else (Zilliacus & Holm, 2013). In groups where the students are divided up on the basis of faith, students are expected to assume an insider perspective on religion. Sometimes there are tensions in the classroom when the group is expected to share the same beliefs, and many of the articles bring up how to handle different perceptions of religious beliefs, as there are many different interpretations and perceptions within the same religion. This sets the scene for teaching where there is a right answer in a completely different way than in non-denominational RE (Heil & Ziebertz, 2004; Rissanen, 2013; Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004; van Eersel et al., 2010), or other school subjects (Lehmann, 2008). The confessional element also affects the perception of the teaching profession and the teacher's authority. Lehman observes that in religion class

³⁶ Cardinal's study (2009) was conducted before the war that is going on in Syria when this thesis was written in 2015.

there was a practice that can be summed up thus: “Essentially, the tradition spoke and the classroom participants listened” (Lehmann, 2008, p. 312).

In denominational and confessional RE, including students’ prior understanding is emphasized as a pedagogical method and tool to get the pupils to grasp the content of the subject and this orientation of RE has a clearer idea of what they want students to think and believe about specific religious issues. In class the teacher presents the notion that there exists one Christian view of marriage (Heil & Ziebertz, 2004), a limited number of interpretations of *Mikra'ot Gedolot* (Lehmann, 2008), or a Muslim view of homosexuality (Rissanen, 2013). In the non-confessional realm it was more common that the teaching instead of being content-oriented was student-oriented, where students' own thoughts and beliefs about content are at the centre and form the hub of the actual teaching (Conroy et al., 2012; Eke et al., 2005; Engebretson, 2004; Fancourt, 2010; Stern, 2010).

Regarding non-confessional RE, studies draw attention to the fact that the subject is not as neutral as it claims to be. Thomas (2011) shows that teaching about African Traditional Religion (ART) is not given equal space in Ghana compared to the majority religions of Islam and Christianity. A similar conclusion emerges from Kittelmann Flensner and Larsson's (2013) analysis of videotaped Swedish RE lessons in the 1960s. Although the curriculum declared that teaching would be neutral, the dominance of Christian content meant that the teaching could not be characterized as neutral and objective. Croché (2013) examines the conflict between the Western scientific discourse and religious discourses in Senegal, and finds that a religious discourse dominates classroom speech, which she believes is problematic when teaching about science.

Previous research in relation to this study

The section on previous research aims to contextualize the thesis in relation to contemporary society, which is characterized by features of secularization and different aspects of diversity. How do young people relate to religion in this context?

The systematic review of classroom research of RE shows that social, ethnic and religious pluralism and diversity have a great impact on the RE-classroom all over the world, regardless of whether it is a confessional or non-confessional RE-classroom. The pluralism in society and classrooms raises questions of neutrality but also how to draw the line in relation to “us” and “the Other”.

2. BACKGROUND

Religion emerges as both a unifying and disruptive force, just as nationalism and the question about the extent to which religion is related to national imaginaries. Thus, possible positions for different people in relation to religion and nationalism are also issues dealt with in the research. Among the studies there is also research with a focus on learning, meaning-making and dialogue.

This thesis aims to analyse how the subject of RE is constructed in the classroom practice through the discourses of the classroom. Entering a Swedish RE-classroom one is struck by the diversity of backgrounds and views regardless of whether the classroom can be described as “multi-ethnic/multicultural” or not. As will be shown in the findings, the questions and problems presented in the articles are highly relevant in relation to this study. However, all studies have different focuses, and for example the question of secularity was not very prominent in the articles, but was a striking feature in the classrooms of this study. In Chapter 9 the findings of this study will be discussed in relation to the previous research presented above.

3. Theoretical approaches

A school subject is in this study perceived as socially and discursively constructed. The theoretical framework underlying aims, research questions, design and analysis of this study has its roots in discourse analysis and curriculum theory. The thesis examines discourses articulated by teachers and students in relation to the RE classroom-practice as these articulations due to this perspective are seen as constituting and constructing the subject. In this chapter, basic assumptions of discourse analysis will be described and related to curriculum theory and Didaktik of RE and to central concepts within these approaches and how these will be used in this study.

Discourses as constructions of meaning

Discourses are closely linked to the concept of meaning. In sum, a discourse can be described as a specific way to talk about and understand various occurrences, which allow certain practices and positions, and restrict others. Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates (2001a) define the study of discourse as:

... The simplest answer is to say that the study of discourse is the study of language in use. [...] Another relatively straightforward response is to say that the study of discourse is the study of meaning making (Wetherell et al., 2001a, p. 3).

There are a plethora of different discourse analytical orientations,³⁷ but all share the view that language is constitutive of social reality, and the meaning of the same word is dependent on the specific context or the discourse in which the word is uttered. Discourses can be described as “formation systems” which in turn shape perceptions of objects, concepts, subjects and approaches.

³⁷ There are several discourse analytical approaches with somewhat different focus and ontological orientation: Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe can be described as poststructuralists focusing on major societal discourses at the macro level (Howarth, 2000; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), discourse psychology which more clearly focuses on social practice, the micro level, but simultaneously relates the concrete articulations to a larger societal context (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Other branches within the field of discourse analysis are more linguistically oriented, see for example critical discourse analysis (CDA), conversation analysis (CA) and functional analysis (Hyland & Paltridge, 2011; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001b; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Discourse analysis can, as in this thesis, be used as a method for analysis of text and speech, but the approach also assumes an ontological position, a way of seeing the world. How the world is perceived and understood from a discourse analytical perspective is dependent on the way we talk about it (Howarth, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Wetherell et al., 2001a). Ontologically the approach assumes a social constructionist stance based on the premise that how we talk about things shapes the way we see and understand them, and in this sense language creates the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Put differently, reality is discursively constructed (Howarth, 2000; Wetherell et al., 2001a). This does not mean that everything *is* language, but all meaning is conveyed through language. This also has implications for the view of scientific knowledge and “truth”. There is no “neutral”, “objective” knowledge, but all descriptions of reality are based on a specific perspective. Howarth (2000) formulates a discourse analytical premise as:

Discourse theory begins with the assumption that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is the product of historically specific systems of rules. It thus inquires into the ways in which social practices construct and contest the discourses that constitute social reality (Howarth, 2000, p 8).

Thus the first research question in this thesis aims to identify discourses of religion articulated in the classroom practice of RE, as school subjects are assumed to be constructed through different ways of speaking, i.e. through discourses. In relation to curriculum theory, I interpret Englund’s (1997, 2004b) description of teaching as *a contribution to the creation of meaning* or *providing opportunities of meaning-making*³⁸ in line with discourses as constructions of meaning. Englund (1997, 2004b) uses the Swedish word [*meningserbjudande*] – which literal translation is “an offer of meaning”. Another possible translation is “sense-making” (cf. Liljenberg, 2015; Nordholm, 2014). From a social constructionist perspective of learning Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) stress sense/meaning making in educational settings as related to processes of dialogue and critical reflection, where learning is understood as social, relational

³⁸ A similar concept is affordance, in this context coined by the psychologist Gibson (1977, 1979). According to Gibson affordances can be understood as possible acts or functions provided the individual by environments or objects. Affordance has been used in educational science (see for example Billet, 2006; Singleton & Aronin, 2007). According to Samuelsson (2010) the concept of teaching as an offer of meaning used by Englund is developed from the concept of affordance.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

constructions of meaning. This thesis aims at analysing the school subject of RE, and the classroom practice is seen as an arena where meaning is created through language use; hence, the analyses will focus the discourses at play in the classroom.

Contingency

Discourse analyses take notice of the relational character of articulations - the same word (i.e. sign) can mean different things in different contexts and definitions are constructed through connotations and in contrast to other signs. Definitions of signs are not obvious in advance but created through negotiation. Since there are different ways to talk (i.e. different discourses) about objects and events, different aspects appear in different discourses. Articulations can thus be described as contingent – they have different meanings in different discourses and these discourses are influenced by historical, political, social, religious etc. contexts. For example, in the results of this thesis, the sign Christianity had different connotations in the classrooms depending upon whether it was talked about as an example of religion in general or talked about in relation to Islam.

Englund (1997, 2004b) describes teaching as social action and argues that school subjects must be seen as contingent, i.e. not obvious in advance. The content of the subject is shaped by historical and social factors and can be seen as an expression of political ambitions to control knowledge and school. Curricula, textbooks, but also teachers' choices of content can be seen from this perspective. However, when the content is introduced in the classroom I argue that further aspects of contingency are added since the school, the program, the class and the individuals contribute to influencing the context as the classroom practice is a social practice and thus ever-changing and unfixed.

Didaktik of RE

This thesis is academically situated in the intersection of Religious Studies and Educational Science. These disciplines are connected in didaktik of RE and I thus want to describe this study as a thesis in the field of Didaktik of Religious Education.³⁹ What is didaktik and Didaktik of Religious Education? A common

³⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, the Swedish use of the word didaktik is closer to the German concept of didaktik than the English word didactics, which is why I follow the example of Kansanen

description of didaktik is as “the art of teaching”.⁴⁰ The word “didaktik” has its root in the Greek word *didaktos*, which means “taught”, the past participle of *didaskhein*, “to teach”. In the seventeenth century Johann Amos Comenius wrote *Didacta Magna* where one of the key elements is the perception of teaching as a process where content and method are intertwined (Kroksmark, 1989). Questions often referred to as “the didaktik questions” that all teachers on a daily basis deal with are traditionally formulated as:

- What? (selection of content)
- How? (instruction strategies)
- Who? (prerequisites for the specific group of pupils)
- Why? (motives for selection of content)

These questions can also serve as a starting point for analysing education and school subjects. However, didaktik must be seen as consisting of both theoretical and analytical aspects as well as practical. The analysis can, for example, be concerned with the content of subjects on the syllabus, textbooks or teaching, how the teaching is performed, how students perceive different features, what they learn etc. Gudem (2011) identifies three levels of didaktik: a theoretical level related to a specific area of research, a practical level in which the teaching takes place. The third level of didaktik Gudem describes as a discursive dimension where didaktik contributes to a common framing that allows teachers and researchers to enter into dialogue about the subject. Didaktik as a field of research and didaktik as a field of practice are therefore not possible to separate but can be seen as a continuum (Englund, 1997).

Klafki (1997), who has had a great influence on the development of the concept of didaktik, maintains that didaktik is action-oriented and consequently normative as it aims to develop practice. The task of didaktik is to analyse and highlight obstacles that prevent teaching from developing self-determination, co-determination and solidarity. Klafki (2000) has constructed a model for

(2009) and Riquarts and Hopmann (1995) and use the German word didaktik as this better encompasses the content I want to describe. Rather than refer to an area of knowledge, didactics seems to refer to mere technical teaching instructions and methodological approaches limited to the how-question (Hamilton, 1999; Kansanen, 2009).

⁴⁰ A similar concept to subject-matter didaktik is Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) coined by Shulman (1987), which also elaborates on the content of teaching as a central factor for understanding teaching and learning. For a comparison of subject-matter didaktik and pedagogical content knowledge see Kansanen (2009).

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

analysing content in teaching from the perspective of the student's personal development as a human being and as a citizen of a democratic society. Accordingly he widens and problematizes analysis of content within school subjects in relation to democratic values and the challenges of contemporary society.

In Didaktik a common distinction is between General Didaktik [Swedish: *allmändidaktik*] and Subject-matter Didaktik [Swedish: *ämnesdidaktik*].⁴¹ In the German tradition General Didaktik is closely related to the concept of *bildung* and general theories of education concerning learning and personal development. In this tradition of General Didaktik the question of selection of content (what) must be seen in relation to this overarching aim of education. In Subject-matter Didaktik, the content and special features of each subject are in focus. An assumption is that different subjects have their special character that needs to be considered when teaching or studying the subject.

How can these theories of didaktik be related to the subject of RE? Didaktik of RE is one of many Subject-matter Didaktik.⁴² Consequently Didaktik of RE can be described as the intersection and hybrid of Religious Studies and Didaktik. Based on a definition of subject-matter didaktik by Aase (1998), Andreassen (2012) defines Didaktik of RE as:

Didaktik of Religious Education comprises all reflections linked to the subject of Religious Education and to teaching within this subject, which can give more knowledge about religion and the role of the subject of Religious Education within the school system, about legitimation of Religious Education and about how knowledge about religion and worldviews can be appropriated, taught and developed (Andreassen, 2012, p. 39, own translation).

Definitions have the disadvantage of limiting and maybe excluding relevant perspectives, but have, on the other hand, the advantage of making explicit how the field of Didaktik of RE can be explored and analysed. According to this definition, Didaktik of RE consists of meta-reflections upon different perspectives on the school subject of RE. Those reflections could, for example, concern history, social construction and legitimacy of the subject as well as include reflections on educational research and theories of teaching and

⁴¹ For a discussion of the concept of general and subject-matter didaktik, see eg. Seel (1999). In addition to general and subject-matter didaktik there are a plethora of different competing didactic models, see for example Meyer (2012).

⁴² Didaktik can in turn be seen as a subdiscipline of Pedagogy (Englund, 1997).

learning related to the subject of RE. The above definition of Didaktik of RE opens up for a definition that, in line with the critical constructive Didaktik of Klafki, relates the subject of RE to a broader societal context. It is normative, as it wants to contribute to the knowledge about and development of the practice of RE. This study can, as mentioned, be described as a study of Didaktik of RE as it aims at analysing what discourses of religion(s) and worldviews are articulated in the RE-classroom, how they are articulated and what implications this might have for the construction of the subject.

Religious Education and Religious Studies

In literature concerning school subjects there seems to be an agreement that it is problematic to perceive subjects as simply transferred university disciplines (Deng & Luke, 2008; Englund, 1997; Goodson et al., 1998; Goodson & Marsh, 1996; Ongstad, 2012). As one of the characteristics of a school subject is communicative and the overall aim is to ensure that students gain new understanding and knowledge school subjects must be seen in context. Ongstad (2012) concludes that teaching is always about something, said by somebody to somebody. He maintains that the focus of research in educational science in recent years has shifted from content-related aspects of the subject to the teaching process. Hence, it is not possible to separate the Didaktik questions about selection of teaching content, how it should be taught, or speak of “pure” knowledge of the subject but the subject knowledge is tinted by the context in which it occurs, and the fact that the subject content knowledge is didaktized, i.e. that the subject has developed practices and discourses in the educational context.

To give an example from the field of RE, research emphasizes that non-confessional RE shares the aims of Religious Studies⁴³ concerning the analysis and understanding of different aspects of religion(s). It is, however, not possible to perceive Religious Education as a mere simplification or a “watered down” version of Religious Studies. RE and Didaktik of RE comprise a branch of Religious Studies but is a field of its own with its own specific conditions and aims (Berglund, 2010; Löfstedt, 2011). These additional objectives concern for example goals of critical thinking and democratic values stated as general

⁴³ As the Swedish subject of RE is non-confessional I consider the academic discipline of Religious Studies and related subdisciplines to be the academic “mother discipline” of RE as it draws most of its facts, perspectives and theories from research within this academic field.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

objectives in all subjects in the curricula. As outlined above concerning Didaktik of RE, RE also includes pedagogical considerations of, for example, how to organise teaching for different students in order to enhance learning, drawing on theories of learning and applied to the subject of RE. Alberts (2007, 2008) argues that RE has been neglected within the field of Religious Studies. Cush (1999) discusses possible reasons for this neglect in the article *Big Brother, Little Sister, and the Clerical Uncle: the Relationship Between Religious Studies, Religious Education and Theology* where she analyses the relationship between Religious Studies and theology on the one hand and RE on the other. She opposes RE being a “second order activity of lesser status” and highlights the relationship between theory and practice in RE. Cush and Robinson (2013) argue for narrowing the gap between the academic subject of Religious Studies and the school-subject and to include more contemporary research from a postcolonial, feminist and queer perspective in RE.

The subject and the classroom as discursive practices

In this thesis, the RE classroom is understood in terms of a specific discursive practice where speech and actions take place and frame the discourses in certain ways (cf. Corsaro, 2005). The questions of what a school subject is or can be and how it is constructed in practice has been present throughout the research process.

According to Ongstad (2012) all school subjects are characterized by communicative aspects but different subjects are to varying degrees dominated by five main constituent elements: *form, content, action, time* and *place*. These are used to communicate and to, in various ways, understand the way the world and these aspects are connected to each other. In a teaching situation teachers and students communicate about the unknown, i.e., the new (facts/concepts/processes etc.) that instruction brings in, described as *expression* or *text*. Through teaching, the new unknown information is linked to what is already known, which Ongstad (2012) describes as a *genre, discourse* or *context* i.e. resources used in education to understand and learn new things.

In the classroom, the context of teaching includes both the *text* (teacher's selection of content expressed in classroom speech, texts, movies, etc.) and *context*, i.e. the specific conditions in which teaching is carried out, and needs to be studied and analysed. Learning is not seen as a one-way transmission of

knowledge but as a process, a form of mutual communication. The “text”, or what is perceived as the content of teaching, must be understood in its context where the teaching occurs. Englund says that “It is never just the text and teaching as such, but it is the text of a specific experienced and perceived context which provides teaching with meaning” (Englund, 1997, p. 129, my translation). A school subject can thus be considered in different ways: as determined by political decisions, or in an essentialist spirit designed and legitimized by the academic scientific discipline or as something that is subject to negotiation and interpretation and thereby historically, socially and thus discursively changeable.

In the interplay between content-students-teacher the contours of the subject of RE emerges. The didaktik triangle⁴⁴ elaborates with these factors in a triangle where the relationship between content, student and teacher is at the centre. The present study focuses on the interplay between content, students and teacher.

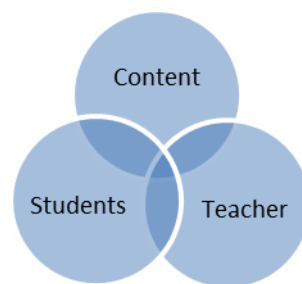


Fig 1. The didaktik triangle

This figure describes the focus of this study through a variation of the didaktik triangle (see eg Hopmann, 1997; Kansanen, 2000; Schoenfeld, 2012). The focus of this study concerns how the subject of RE can be constructed in the classroom practice through the interplay between content, teacher and students.

In a classroom there is an immense number of processes at play; all individuals bring into the classroom their personal understanding and experiences, their personality and current disposition, relations within the group, etc. This is, however, not the focus of analyses in this thesis, even though these kinds of factors affect what teachers and students say and do. Content cannot be seen as an independent actor, but appears through a teacher’s instruction. He or she

⁴⁴ The didactic triangle has been frequently used in educational literature (see for example Hopmann, 1997; Kansanen, 2000; Schoenfeld 2012) and modeled in different ways to emphasize different aspects of the learning process.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

introduces concepts and phenomena as subject related content as well as questions to be discussed by teachers and students in the classroom (cf. Hopmann, 1997; Schoenfeld, 2012). In Englund's (1997) wording, the text has to be analysed in its context in order to understand what happens in the classroom. The focus of study in this thesis concerns the construction of RE in the classroom-practice and discourses of religion and worldviews articulated in the classroom by students and teachers, but also in texts, teaching materials etc. when they are part of the classroom practice.

Religions and worldviews - definitions

A characteristic of Swedish RE is that the subject since 1960 includes both teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews. This is also a reason why "religions and worldviews" are part of the aim and research questions of this thesis. Religions and worldviews are contested concepts, which is why something needs to be said about how they have been used in the Swedish debate and how I intend to use them in this thesis.

To define the phenomenon which in everyday language is referred to as "religion" has occupied scholars within the field for centuries, and there exist vast numbers of definitions, but none has gained supremacy and there is no consensus on how to define this concept. The definitions are influenced by the historical and political contexts in which they arise. Many of the definitions tend to be ethnocentric and assume implicitly Western, Christian and Enlightenment ideas and ideals and, for example, emphasise beliefs rather than acts (Asad, 1993; McCutcheon, 1997).

One way of trying to understand religions is to define aspects or dimensions as characteristics of religion. For example, Smart (1977) highlights six dimensions of religion: the ritual dimension, the mythological dimension, the doctrinal dimension, the ethical dimension, the social dimension and the experiential dimension as central in the process of understanding religion and what religion might mean to a believer. Other dimensions could be the narrative dimension and the institutional dimension (Rydving, 2013).

A common way of categorising definitions of religion is to divide them into substantial and functional definitions. Simply put, substantial definitions is an attempt to define the characteristics of religion, what religion is. Substantial definitions often contain expressions about the objects of beliefs, beliefs in a divine/spiritual/supraempirical being or about the relation of man to

something holy.⁴⁵ Substantial definitions come close to a common, everyday understanding of what religion is, “to believe in a God”, but can be criticized for being ethnocentric and assuming characteristics of Western and Christian religion to be universal. Functional definitions focus on what religion means and does in the life of people or the function religion has in groups and societies. Many of the functional definitions of religion focus on human beings as meaning seekers and how they relate to conditions of existence. One criticism of functional definitions of religion is that they are so vague and general that anything people find meaningful can be defined as religion (Furseth & Repstad, 2006).

There are, as will be described below, resemblances between functional definitions of religion and definitions of worldviews. The divide between substantial and functional aspects also occurs in relation to the concept of worldview.

What is a worldview? In the syllabus of RE, the Swedish word [*livsåskådning*] is used, which in this thesis has been translated “worldview”, but there does not seem to exist an exact equivalent word in English to the Swedish concept of *livsåskådning*. Jeffner (1973) states that the English words *worldview* (equivalent to the German word *Weltanschauung*), *outlooks of the world*, *philosophy*, *philosophy of life*, *life-philosophy* and *ideology* seem to be used to cover the same content. In recent doctoral theses *livsåskådning* and related concepts are translated into English as *life-view* (Gustavsson, 2013), *view of life* (Risenfors, 2011) *life philosophy* (Falkevall, 2010; Gunnarsson, 2008) and *life-understanding* (Osbeck, 2006).⁴⁶ The word has evidently been used in Sweden since 1848 (“Livsaskådning”, 2015), and is for example used in the syllabus from 1928 (Bergqvist & Wallin, 1928) where it is stated that the subject Knowledge of Christianity should include teaching about Christian beliefs and worldview [Swedish: *livsåskådning*].

The concept became the subject of debate in relation to a book by Ingemar Hedenius from 1951 *Att välja livsåskådning* [*To choose a worldview*].⁴⁷ As part of his

⁴⁵ See for example definitions offered by Tylor (2010 [1903]), Robertson (1970) Hill (1973), Spiro (1966).

⁴⁶ The German word *Lebensanschauung* is a direct linguistic parallel. In Norwegian the equivalent concept is *livssyn* and in Danish *livsanskuelse*.

⁴⁷ Hedenius was a highly controversial person engaged in the public debate, and in 1949 he wrote *Tro och vetande* [*Believing and knowing*], a critique of theology, the church’s role in society and the truth claims of Christianity. His atheistic and secularistic position resulted in the comment from the orientalist Professor Henrik Samuel Nyberg: “There is no God and Ingemar Hedenius is his prophet” (Nordin, 2004, p. 518, own translation).

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

critique of Christianity, he outlined the concept of worldview, which he defines as concerning beliefs about life and humankind, history of the universe and some moral convictions. In 1973 Jeffner outlined a definition of the concept that has been widely used in research ever since in which he also includes a basic attitude to life. He defines a worldview as:

A person's worldview refers to a person's central value system and his or her basic attitude as well as that part of the person that the person considers to be self-knowledge and knowledge of the world around him/her, which affects his/her central value system or one's basic attitude in a way that the person is willing to accept (Jeffner, 1973, p. 18, own translation).

This definition of a worldview thus contains theories about human beings and the world (a cognitive element), a central value system with values and norms (an action-oriented element) and a “basic attitude” or “life mood” (an emotional element) which Jeffner describes as the way the individual perceives his/her situation in the world – with a fundamental feeling of hope or despair, trust or distrust, optimism or pessimism. The components in the worldview interplay, but in light of Jeffner's definition, theories of the world, i.e. the substantial and cognitive aspects of the worldview come about as fundamental since these affect the value system and the basic attitude toward life. With this definition organized religious as well as non-religious worldviews could be studied and religion becomes a subcategory of worldviews. In the literature a distinction is made between organized worldviews and personal worldviews (Hartman, 1986a, 1986b, 1994; Jackson & Mazza, 2014; van der Kooij, de Ruyter & Miedema, 2013). Organised worldviews can be described as developed over time and relatively coherent, established systems of beliefs and rituals. Examples of organized worldviews in the above sense can be religious worldviews such as Christianity and Hinduism, and non-religious worldviews such as existentialism, marxism, feminism, ecosophy, humanism, and worldview perspectives in psychology and science (Bråkenhielm, 1991, 1992). The wording concerning worldviews in the syllabus of RE in Lpf 94 and Lgy 11 has been interpreted as to include teaching about these specific worldviews and is commonly included in textbooks of RE as examples of non-religious worldviews.⁴⁸ The course of RE at upper secondary school thus often includes

⁴⁸ Exampels from three RE textbooks of upper secondary school: existentialism, feminism, marxism and ecosophy in Mattson Flennegård and Eriksson (2013), humanism, existentialism in Ring (2013); or secular humanism, atheism, marxism and existentialism in Björlin and Jämterud (2013).

teaching about existentialism, feminism, humanism and marxism (cf Löfstedt 2013). This understanding of worldview is in line with the term non-religious convictions used in the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.⁴⁹ The concept of non-religious convictions takes the religious position as its starting point and is a negation and thus relative. The concept of worldview might be perceived as a more neutral concept compared to non-religious convictions as it encompasses both religious worldviews, non-religious worldviews, worldviews between and beyond (Jackson & Mazza, 2014).

The threefold definition of Jeffner has been the starting point for an extensive amount of empirical work aiming at mapping and understanding constructions and functions of worldviews in different contexts (see for example Bråkenhielm, 2001; Falkevall, 2010; Gunnarsson, 2008; Gustavsson, 2013; Hartman, 1986a, 1986b, 1994; Risenfors, 2011). In the wake of the empirical work a discussion of the functional aspects of the worldview have been highlighted. A critique concerns the fact that the definition tends to overemphasise the substantial and cognitive aspects of worldviews on behalf of the functional aspects (Gunnarsson, 2008). In empirical research the meaning and function of the personal worldview has been more focused. Hartman (1986a, 1986b) uses Jeffner's definition but adjusts it as he conducted research on worldviews espoused by children and youths. In this work Hartman distinguishes between organised worldview and a personal worldview. Admittedly a personal worldview can be influenced by an organised worldview, but a personal worldview is the approach, perception or attitude of the individual with regard to questions about humankind, society, God, the world, reality and history and about values. Hartman also analyses how these attitudes are put into action, i.e. not just a way to think about life, but a way to live life. In this sense Hartman argues that all humans have a personal worldview, or in his later work a "personal interpretation of life" (Hartman & Torstenson-Ed, 2007). Instead of focusing on the worldview per se, the focus is on human beings as meaning-makers and the process of interpreting the different aspects of life. It has also been highlighted that personal worldviews many times are fragmented, inconsistent and contradictory (Burén, 2015; Gustavsson, 2013; Risenfors, 2011).van der Kooij et al. (2013) elaborate on what a distinction between an organised worldview and a personal worldview can imply in RE.

⁴⁹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

An organised worldview they define as prescribing answers to existential questions, containing moral values and aiming at providing the meaning of life. A personal worldview likewise answers existential questions and contains moral values but having a personal worldview furthermore means experiencing the meaning in life and the personal worldview influences both acting and thinking. Related to RE van der Kooij et al. (2013) discuss pedagogical problems and benefits of using these two concepts in RE. When discussing organized worldviews in RE it is important to problematize the relation between the two – even if a person sees herself as embracing a certain organized worldview this does not mean that her personal worldview is identical to the organized worldview nor are organized worldviews ever monolithic.⁵⁰

The research on the worldviews of children gave rise to the life-question pedagogy as mentioned in the background. In this approach, pupils' existential questions comprised the centre of teaching. Hartman (2000) argues that issues related to religion are abstract. To make children develop knowledge and conceptual understanding, the way to go is to concretise. In order to concretise this abstract content the teacher needs to use the children's experiences and interest, and in order to do this it is important to know what children are thinking and wondering about. Life-question pedagogy is related to the concept of worldview, but takes as the starting point the questions of children, not a certain religion or any organised worldview.

Religion and worldview in this thesis

What does this imply for this thesis? The concept of worldview [Swedish: *livsåskådning*] mentioned in the syllabus can be understood in terms of organised worldviews with focus on substantial and cognitive aspects such as beliefs and perceptions. When the term is used in this way there is usually a distinction between “religion and worldviews” stating implicitly that worldviews are equal to secular worldviews, but regardless of this, religion and worldview are used interchangeably. However, the concept of worldview is also used in Swedish RE in terms of a personal worldview that expresses personal attitudes and personal interpretations of (more or less) existential issues. Then a religious or a non-religious worldview is articulated as one among many possible worldviews or interpretations of life. In the syllabus of RE the concepts are

⁵⁰ Cf. Jacksons (1997, 2004) *Interpretive approach* with representations of religions, interpretation, reflection and edification.

mainly used in the substantial way but there is a tradition within RE of life-question pedagogy where existential questions about life are discussed. In this thesis no stipulative definition of religion and worldviews is postulated. The discourses in the classroom are framed by the fact that according to the schedule, RE-related topics should be discussed. This implies talking about religion and worldviews in various ways. The study consequently has an inductive approach and aims to explore discourses articulated in the RE classroom.

Discourse analysis in this study

What does the discourse analytical approach imply in the present study? First and foremost, it means that the teachers' and students' conversations in the classroom are seen as constitutive for the subject of RE and part of an opportunity for understanding and meaning-making. The subject is not something that exists in any "objective" sense - it is created in the interaction between the educational content and the social interactions in the classroom. With discourse analysis as a tool this study seeks to make explicit and articulate the pedagogical practice.

In the classrooms there were different ways of speaking about the RE-content i.e. there were different discourses at play. Within all discourses there is an effort to fixate the role and meaning of different words (signs), there is a continual negotiation of what interpretation should be related to the different words. In discourse analytical terms there is an on-going discursive struggle. In cases where a discourse has gained hegemony, the meaning stands out as natural and obvious. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) call the fixation of a sign's meaning "moment". "Element" is, however, when a sign can have varying meanings, but in the discursive practice there is always a desire to fix the meaning (closure) i.e. making moments out of elements and thus limiting the number of possible articulations. Some elements are very open to be loaded with different meanings, and these Laclau and Mouffe (2001) describe as floating signifiers. One example of a floating signifier is for instance the concept of religion, prevalent in different discourses but a word that may have very different meanings in different contexts. As will be shown in the empirical chapters below, in the secularist discourse religion had connotations of oppression and unintelligence whereas religion in the Swedishness discourse was related to ethnicity and cultural heritage. The fixation of meaning in a particular area is

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

what constitutes a discourse, but unlike Saussure's structuralism theory, discourse analysis emphasizes that all fixations of meanings are temporary and subject to discursive struggle (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, Howarth, 2000). This means that what is said in the classroom is not considered an expression of each individual's personal understanding and perception - it is very possible that it is but that is not the focus here; statements in the classroom are considered just as much a part of discourses. I describe and analyse the discourses at play in the RE classroom and relate them to examples of the same discourses articulated in other arenas.

All practices that create a relation between elements Laclau and Mouffe (2001) describe as articulation. Put another way, articulation is the concrete way things are formulated in a specific context and loaded with meaning. The concept of articulation can thus both describe and explain the change of discourse, but also the reproduction of a particular way of describing and understanding the social reality. The focus of analyses is the content of RE as it is articulated by teachers and students in the classrooms, what is said, how it is said and what meaning is ascribed to the articulations in that context. In order to explain the functions of the analytical concept within discourse analyses, Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) distinguish between discourse analytical concepts that answer questions of what and how: The concepts of sign, moment and element answer the question: of what is the discourse constructed? Articulations, on the other hand, focus on how the discourse is constructed. The concept of articulation is thus relational and concerns the question of how different signs are tied together and contrasted and hence how the meaning of the signs changes, producing a new fixation (moment). Articulations are used to analyse how the practical use of language creates (changeable) images of the content of RE through certain signs given a certain meaning in the discourse. Articulation therefore also concerns the question of contingency. The discourse in this sense is perceived as a structure, but the analyses also concern how this structure through the articulations becomes contingent and changeable and hence places focus on the practice of language in the classroom.

As the aim and research questions in this thesis are related to how the content of RE is articulated, I will highlight articulations that together constitute a cluster of articulations as they are close in content and meaning, which in turn together create the discourse (Risenfors, 2011). I use the term articulation cluster, sometimes referred to as nodal points. In the results I will not focus on the close linguistic relation between signs constructing the nodal points or how

the chains of equivalence are constructed, as the focus of the study concerns the content of the subject which is why I choose the term articulation cluster.

It was clear that there were specific ways of speaking within the RE classroom practice, and that certain ways of speaking dominated above other ways of speaking. Central to the poststructuralist way of seeing discourses, is the concept of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Hegemony in the context of discourse analysis is based on the idea that certain ways of talking about the world in specific contexts have greater impact than others and, thus perceived as a more “natural” way of speaking, therefore become hegemonic in relation to other discourses within the same field. However, one should keep in mind that all discourses, even the hegemonic ones, are partial and temporary fixations of meaning. Various discourses may come in conflict or imply an antagonistic attitude towards each other, but within discourse there is, as previously mentioned, a desire to limit the number of articulations and exclude other possible ways to describe reality. The so-called hegemonic intervention means that there are attempts to suppress alternative views of reality in an articulation, dissolve antagonism, restore coherency, and fix elements across discourses that collide (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The classroom conversations are analysed and understood as part of the discourses that exist both in the classroom and in other parts of society. These discourse analytical premises give rise to questions that have guided the analysis, such as: What is possible to articulate, and what is impossible to articulate concerning different religions, religiosity, secularity and pluralism, i.e. what discourses come about when RE is on the schedule? Are some discourses hegemonic in relation to others? What words and concepts (signs) build the discourses, and how are they loaded with content and meaning? To the extent that it occurs, how are negotiations of the hegemonic discourses of the classroom implemented? What positions are legitimate and which are illegitimate? How do the wordings in the classroom relate to the discourses that occur in other parts of society? Through these kinds of starting points, articulations in the classrooms are analysed.

4. Method

In this chapter the design of the study will be described and motivated. The chapter starts with a presentation of the study's ethnographic approach and a discussion related to quality in qualitative research stressing the importance of aspects of reflexivity. Thereafter the implementation of the study is described concerning the selection of and access to the schools where the study was carried out and a brief presentation of the schools, followed by a description of the analysis process. The chapter ends with ethical considerations.

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore how RE is constructed in practice in the Swedish contemporary pluralistic context. But how to achieve the goal? And what is a subject in practice, what is possible to observe of a subject in a classroom? Since the interest of the thesis is specifically concerned with the expressions of a school subject in practice, it was apparent early on in the process that the empirical data of the thesis would consist of classroom events, focusing on the interaction between students, teachers and content of the subject as shown in the didactical triangle. My point of departure is that teaching is a process where teachers, students and subject interact and together create the lesson. All teachers who have had a lesson twice, with the same material and arrangement in different classes, know that two lessons will never be identical. This is related to many factors such as students' prior understanding, group dynamics, the teacher's relationship to the group, current emotional state and more (see for example Gredler, 2005). Despite, or perhaps because of this teaching experience, initially I had difficulties in choosing a focus. What was to be observed? What significance had the relationship between the students in the group and the teacher-student relation for what was said and could be said in the classroom? What influenced how the subject turned out in practice? What was essential to pay attention to in order to understand what happened in classrooms? Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stress the importance of being well informed and prepared before going into the field, but that the researcher has to stay reflexive throughout all stages of the research process. They maintain that the problem area and research questions seldom are finished before the field work begins (which was the case in the research process of this study) - it

is when a concrete environment is selected it becomes clear if the questions are relevant and possible to answer in the current context.

Ethnography

In order to reach the goal of the study, an ethnographic approach and methods associated with ethnography have been used. Ethnography is sometimes described as merely a collection of methods used to conduct empirical research with participant observation as the prime method for data collection. The term can also be described as a perspective or approach based on epistemological assumptions about how to acquire knowledge about the world (Geertz, 1973), but it can also be used for the results of the study (Macdonald, 2007). Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland (2007) argues that ethnography is characterized by its diversity, and research with an ethnographic approach has described diverse social phenomena, from early anthropological descriptions of lifestyles and beliefs of “distant” people to descriptions of various groups and institutions in the local community. The studies have different theoretical starting points, different focuses and different claims of knowledge. The common denominator is that it is an interpretive approach which aims at understanding social phenomena and practices, human behaviour and thoughts and the significance and meaning of different phenomena to different people (Atkinson et al., 2007).

Ethnography in school settings

There have been a number of ethnographic studies done in the school environment.⁵¹ The school is and has always been the subject of conflicting interests: traditions and values are to be transferred to the next generation, and children and young people are educated to face societal changes. The school is an arena that both reproduces and produces values, perceptions and identities (see e.g. Ball, 1981; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Willis, 1977). Thus, the school is interesting to study from a variety of perspectives, and ethnographers have studied the social interaction involved in creating social power structures concerning, class, gender and ethnicity-relations. In this

⁵¹ For an overview of ethnography in educational settings from different theoretical perspectives see Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2007)

4. METHOD

process, the school has often been seen as a representative of the state and a manifestation of how a society treats oppressed groups (Gordon et al., 2007).

Green and Bloome (1996) distinguish between ethnography *of* education and ethnography *in* education. This distinction refers to the difference in the knowledge interest. Sociological and anthropological studies that use school- and education-oriented environments as one of several possible settings for a study often aim to illustrate how different groups experience different social phenomena, and the school becomes an illustration of this phenomenon. These studies are often characterized by strong theoretical framing and this type of ethnography is characterized as ethnography of education. Ethnography in education however, aims at describing and analysing particular school- and education-related issues. Yet Green and Bloome (1996) admit that the boundary between these two categories is often blurred. Using these terms, this study would be of the latter kind, an ethnographic study in education.

One difficulty in carrying out ethnographic studies in schools is that everyone, including the researcher/observer, have themselves gone to school and therefore the school is a well-known environment, which might make it more difficult to discern what is actually happening there. Gordon et al. (2007) testify to this difficulty. Anthropologists using ethnography have traditionally striven to make the unknown known and familiar, but the school setting requires the researcher to take a step back in order to appreciate subtle structures and events in this environment. Delamont and Atkinson (1995) outline strategies that can be used in “fighting familiarity” such as studying the unusual and abnormal, studying the “other” cultures within the culture, studying education in non-educational settings or adopting, for example, a gender or theoretical perspective in order to view the familiar environment with new eyes. The description of educational ethnography by Lund and Sundberg (2004) have been a guideline in the research process:

... [educational ethnography is a] sort of theoretical reconstruction of human meaning-making in specific cultural contexts. By empirically starting in the particular rather than the general, the concrete rather than the abstract, contextual rather than the decontextualized, the time-bound rather than the timeless and the complex and ambiguous rather than the simple and unequivocal, one tries to reconstruct the pedagogical practice (Lund & Sundberg, 2004, p. 40, own translation).

This formulation highlights that ethnography of education implies a specific epistemological position. The ambition in the study has been this – to position

myself in the classroom as an observer, to sit in the RE-classroom and notice what is said, how it is said and how meaning is constructed in the specific setting. Through analysis of the particular and concrete in the RE-classroom, delineations of the RE-practice emerge that will hopefully contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the subject of RE.

Quality in qualitative studies

This study has been carried out in the qualitative field, which creates its specific possibilities and limitations for knowledge and understanding in the area of research.

In the ethnographic debate “the crisis of ethnography” has been received with apprehension. The debate concerns the question of representation (Gillies & Alldred, 2002; Lather, 2007; Marcus, 2007). This “crisis” is shared by all qualitative research that in any way claims to comment on social reality and human experience. With the entry of postmodernism, the view of knowledge has changed. Lyotard (1984) suggests that major, general, accepted truths, which he calls the grand narratives, the stories that dominated conceptions of society during modernity, no longer can be legitimized. Knowledge becomes fragmented and pluralistic and therefore relative. This led to questions of whose knowledge, whose truth was to be presented as solid scientific knowledge. Production of knowledge is never objective, neutral or innocent. There is always a relationship between knowledge production and power relations. Literature dealing with quality in qualitative studies maintains that the questions of representation are ethical as well epistemological (see eg Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2002; Seale, 1999).

In social science “the linguistic turn” has had a major impact on the perception of language, also within ethnographic research. Through the linguistic turn attention was drawn to the effects of people’s statements rather than any underlying intentions of the articulations. This complicates the question of representation and the insider/outsider perspective in ethnography (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; van Loon, 2007). However, in line with this poststructuralist view of language, the focus of this study is on the discourses at play in the RE-classroom; it is not my purpose to determine the views of individual students and teachers and what they mean by their statements and in that sense claim to take “the insider’s perspective”.

4. METHOD

Criteria of quality

What characterizes good quality in qualitative studies in general and ethnographic studies in particular? Guba (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) point out that criteria of quality are dependent on ontological and epistemological perspectives. In research with a constructivist approach, (which Guba (1981) originally labelled “naturalistic”) the first of the two basic criteria is trustworthiness, which relates to credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. In other words, a study is assessed in relation to how credible the results are, if the theories and methods of empirical investigation and analysis are explicit and transparent, and there is a possibility to verify the results by looking at empirical evidence. The second criterion relates to authenticity – is a fair picture presented of the people who were part of the survey? This criterion also relates to qualities that concern consequences of an emancipatory character for participants of the study.

Reflexivity is a term that ethnographers have used as tool to become aware of their own premises and truth claims and helps researchers to commute between closeness and distance (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Lather, 2007; Lykke, 2009; Macdonald, 2007). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) argue that researchers who use qualitative methods should focus on maintaining clear systematics when they create their empirical material and be aware that all research is about interpretation and that interpretation is done by a person with a specific perspective; i.e. there must be transparency at all stages of the research process in order to make it possible for the reader to judge whether the interpretations are reasonable and “sound” or not.

But is not all knowledge, despite transparency of approach and reflection on the research subject and the researched object, composed of subjective images described from the researcher's perspective? The epistemological assumption on which this study is based is not essentialist: to present “how it is”. Nonetheless it claims to present analytical assumptions based on solid transparent empirical findings, which implies that the conclusions are likely and reasonable perspectives based on empirical findings. The question placed focus on the complexity of the research. Irrespective of how neutral and open the researcher tries to be, he or she will nonetheless enter the field with a certain prior understanding which tints perceptions. To avoid or minimize the consequences of this problem, researchers have attempted to describe their own pre-understanding, making it clear whoever he or she is, how the

interpretation of the material was carried out (Macdonald, 2007; Spencer, 2007), and by allowing the participants to tell their stories and allow different stories to stand alongside of each other (Lather, 2007). The question also reveals the difficulty in describing a complex and ambiguous reality in words: “Every ethnographer is painfully aware of the discrepancy between the lived experience and the paucity of the language used to characterise it” (Bruner, 1983, p. 6).

Qualitative research and claims of generalization

How can one understand and reason about empirical data as a basis for conclusions and generalizations? Do the results of qualitative studies explain something about human existence and society, or are all cases totally unique? If the latter is the case, why bother with research and submitting to rules of transparency in all parts of the research process, and instead turn to writing novels? Glynos and Howarth (2007) believe that it is possible to generalize the results of qualitative studies if theoretical and empirical elements are united. Generalization of the results can be used in the qualitative research done by the social sciences, but factors such as reactivation, deconstruction, commensuration and articulation must be part of the process. The underlying premises must be clarified in order to evaluate the results. Glynos and Howarth (2007) do not want to choose between universal mechanisms or the particular and eclectic. The concept of subsumption is a prerequisite to explanation – otherwise research concerns only descriptive particularism. The solution is, in other words, clarity of the theoretical premises, transparency in the construction of empirical data and analysis and comparison between different cases:

Accordingly, we suggest that what makes possible singularity and generalizability of each case is the background theoretical framework informing the analysis, coupled with the articulatory process itself (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 189).

I would say that we have to believe that it is possible to learn more about the social world, contexts, groups and individuals and that understanding of other people is possible, despite differences in backgrounds, experiences, gender, social status, education, age, etc. Although it isn't possible to examine a distinct clear “slice of life” when it comes to educational settings as there are an immense amount of factors that determine classroom events, I still believe with reference to the reasoning of i.e. Barad's (2003), Guba and Lincoln's (1994) or Alvesson and Sköldbberg's (2009) work that it is possible to reach important

4. METHOD

insights about the area of study although one cannot claim to present the One Truth, but rather partial truths (Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

The same criteria for quality in qualitative ethnographic studies of trustworthiness and authenticity discussed above are applicable to the quality of discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Through transparency in theoretical premises, how data is constructed, how it has been handled, interpreted and analysed and by giving empirical examples that support claims and conclusions, credibility is generated. Discourse analysis involves relating various cases, and comparing statements articulated in the empirical material with statements articulated in other contexts, i.e. to describe and compare different discourses that exist within the discursive field (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

Reflexions on the role of researcher

I'm a teacher in the field I was studying and have worked in similar environments. "The risk" that I would identify with the classroom teachers was apparent, and during the field work and in the work of analysing the empirical material, I felt a strong loyalty towards the teachers who opened their classrooms to me. As a teacher I know that teaching is a complex activity in which the teacher's professionalism is constantly put to the test - during each lesson countless situations occur which give rise to choices that the teacher has to handle, and the teacher usually has less than one second to choose how she or he will react and act. There is no objective right or wrong action in these situations and a teacher is constantly asking him/herself whether he/she did the right thing. I did, and so did the teachers in the classes where I did participant observations. Would I have acted differently on the basis of the given circumstances in the different classes? These feelings were strong during the field work, and could be used as an argument that teachers should not be researching the practice of which they are a part and identify with. Simultaneously I was there in another role and sought to have an analytical perspective on the classroom practice and was continually taking an open but critically reflective approach to both the environment being studied and my own role as researcher, thus attaining through this some distance. This was however not always easy, and my experience and identity as a teacher made it sometimes hard to stay in the role of the observer. On a few occasions I chose to step out of my role as a researcher and enter my teacher role. When this

happened it was related to situations where students were being verbally violated or humiliated in the classroom by other students.

I will give an example from a lesson where I found it problematic to stay in a strict observing role. The class was made up of students enrolled on the vocational study programmes called Electrical and Energy Programme [Swedish: *Elprogrammet*] and the Industry Engineering Programme [Swedish: *Industriprogrammet*].⁵² About half of the students in the group had, according to those students I talked to, a Sunni Muslim background, and several of the students had told me in the corridor before the lesson started that they looked forward to reading about Islam in RE: “I know quite a lot about Islam, you know!” one said, and the group of students I talked to seemed to agree on that “extremists, Wahhabists and Salafists” destroy the image of Islam: “Most Muslims are not like that, you know”, they told me. The lesson started with the screening of a documentary about Islam. Then the students were supposed to work individually on study questions, but very few did. There was a great deal of unrest in the classroom; people were walking around, looking at their mobile phones, and talking. Negative comments and jokes with an antireligious and Islamophobic undertone started to “fly around” the classroom, mostly articulated by students who positioned themselves as ethnically Swedish. When one of the students yelled “The Bible is toilet paper, the Qur'an is toilet paper, and what have the Jews? Toilet rolls”? I interpreted that at least one of his classmates with Muslim background became sad, rather than upset or angry. My immediate reaction was that I thought the comment quite disrespectful. The teacher did not take any notice of this situation and I chose to sit beside these students and talk with them. In most situations during the fieldwork I held a low profile and did not intervene. This situation, however, activated my teacher identity and made me feel that I had to intervene as I interpreted the situation as one student being disrespectful and thus violating the other students. In fieldwork Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) distinguish between the position of complete observer, observer as participant, the participant as observer and the position of complete participant. Being a “complete participant” implies the observed group is quite homogenous and disregards different positions of power relations among the participants. For me as an educated adult, and a trained teacher, it was not possible to take a position as “complete participant” in the group of students. Neither did I (with a few exceptions, as mentioned

⁵² This example is referred to both in Chapter 5 (excerpt 14) and Chapter 8 (excerpt 103).

4. METHOD

above) participate in the classroom as a teacher, but I tried to take a position in between being an observer as participant and a participant as observer and have a respectful but curious approach in relation to both teachers and students in order to understand the discourses at play in the classroom practice.

Regardless of these difficulties and dilemmas I believe it is an advantage that I am a teacher as I am well acquainted with the conditions of the classroom practice, the teachers' work and the complexity of the teaching profession. And because of this, I will be able to see things that are harder to discern for someone who does not have this experience.

Empirical data

The empirical data in this study was constructed through participant observations at RE-lessons at three upper secondary schools. Field notes of the observations, audio files from lessons, teaching material, and some student assignments are part of the empirical material forming the basis of the analysis.

Pilot study

To test whether my questions were possible to answer and whether it was possible to make observations in the way I expected, i.e. what was possible to discern in a classroom with a focus that concerned a school-subject, a pilot study was conducted during four weeks in the spring of 2011. Through April - May 2011 I followed four teachers at two different schools in their RE-classes. Throughout these lessons, I tried to write down “everything” that was said in the classroom and typed out these notes on a computer every night. This preliminary study resulted in finding interesting differences between vocational programs and programs preparatory for higher education programs, despite the fact that the students studied the same course. This contributed to my decision to include teaching in both types of programs. I also realized that it would be interesting to document classroom discussions by audio recording compared to simply taking notes. However it was my impression that video recording would not contribute to a large extent with additional relevant information to answer research questions and reach the aim of the study, but that audio recording would help to achieve the outcome I desired.

The study

Selection

Based on an aspiration to conduct participant observation in both academic and vocational programs, and the fact that the schools would have a group of students with different compositions, three schools in three different environments were selected: a school located near one of the largest cities in Sweden, a school in a small municipality in a rural area, and a school in a medium-sized Swedish city. The schools can be described as relatively large (1100-1700 students) municipal schools. Since I had a subject focus, I chose to observe several teachers working in different programmes, spending 5-6 weeks at each school.

Access

As in most ethnographic studies, the access to the field of study takes various forms. In order to access schools, I asked around among acquaintances if they knew some Religious Education teachers who would be willing to participate in the study. Through this inquiry, I got two names of teachers working at two different schools, and I contacted them via email. These teachers were in favour of participation and when I inquired as to whether there were more RE-teachers at the school, I was invited to come and present my project at a subject meeting of all Religious Education teachers at each school. When I presented my project and at school No. 1, four teachers were positive, and at school No. 2, all 8 RE teachers accepted to participate. One teacher was on parental leave, and she was later contacted by e-mail and agreed to participate. For technical reasons concerning the schedule, I was only able to participate in six of the teachers' classes. At school No. 3, I had on one occasion as an educator met a teacher that I knew was a qualified teacher in Religious Education and this teacher was contacted by mail. Here too I was invited to a subject-meeting of RE teachers to present my project and what it would entail to participate. There were three teachers present at that time and they agreed to participate. One of these later chose not to participate in the study. Two teachers who did not attend the meeting were contacted by mail, one of which announced that she did not want to participate, but one agreed. After this I wrote a letter to the school management at each school where I described the aim and approach of the study (see *Appendix 4*). In all cases, I received school management authorization to conduct the study.

4. METHOD

In all research that involves humans, it is essential that all participants have the opportunity to give their active informed consent. At the first lesson in each class, I presented myself to the class; I told them who I was, my background, what I was doing at their school, i.e. the aim and design of the study, that I had the school management and teachers' permission to implement it, but that I also needed their active consent. I also informed the students about what it would entail for them, that I would audio record whole-class discussions during lessons and maybe talk to them in class, and I explained how the material would be stored and used – that all information gathered would be encoded and processed in such a way that no single person could be recognized. Furthermore, I explained that the teacher did not have access to my notes or audio files. Not participating meant that the words and utterances of these students would not be used as a basis for analysis in the thesis. There was also time for questions. All the students were given an information letter which stated what I had informed them about, my contact details if they were wondering about something and a form to fill out in which they agreed to participate or not (see *Appendix 5*). The vast majority of students were positive to participating and expressed that they found it interesting to be part of a research project of this kind. I had access to class lists of students where I noted those who responded, but in several classes, there were a couple of students who were missing. At the beginning of each lesson I asked if there was anyone who had not filled in the form, but unfortunately still a number of students did not submitted this consent form. If this is because the class lists were not accurate, or because these students had very high rates of absenteeism during the weeks I spent at the school or if they simply did not submit this form, I cannot say, but they were invited to complete this form several times. It is worth noting that none of the students withdrew their participation or asked to be dismissed during the study. As I followed a large number of classes, I had not the chance to learn the names of all the students, but the names of the students who did not wish to participate (25 students in total out of 421, see *Appendix 3*) I brought into every class and asked the teacher to show me who they were so that I could avoid talking to them. If they spoke in class I marked it in the observation protocol and took it away from the audio files and did not transcribe their words. In practice, this was not a major problem as it turned out that those who chose not to participate were not very talkative in class. I hope it was not due to my presence. I asked the teachers a few times about this,

but their opinion was that these students were usually fairly silent and that there was no difference compared to when I was not in the classroom.

School No. 1

The first school had about 1,700 students divided into ten national programs and four introductory programs for students that for different reasons are not eligible for a national program. The school was situated in a municipality next to a large city, and was considered one of the most popular schools in the region. The statistics over marks and national tests for this school showed higher levels than the average in the country both in vocational programmes and programmes preparatory for higher education (Skolverket 2015b). Almost 50% of the students lived in the community, and the rest travelled from other municipalities (statistics from 2010, the municipality's own quality audit). More than half of the students lived in other municipalities so the statistics available did not reveal the socioeconomic background of the whole school with statistics of parents' income, educational level or ethnic background. But the municipality's population had relatively high incomes, low rates of unemployment, and a high proportion of well-educated inhabitants than the average in the country, and only about 10% of the inhabitants were born in a country other than Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2012).

At this school I observed four teachers who taught two classes on the Natural Science Programme [Swedish: *Naturvetenskapligt program*] and three classes on the Social Science Programme [Swedish: *Sambällsvetenskapligt program*]. I spent five weeks at this school during the autumn of 2011 and participated in 38 lessons that varied from 60 minutes to 170 minutes.

School No. 2

The second school was located in a smaller municipality situated in a rural area. The school had about 1,300 students enrolled in thirteen national programs, one local program, one program for upper secondary apprenticeship education and an introductory program for students not eligible for the national programs. A little more than 50% of the students lived in the municipality, and the rest came from other municipalities, mainly the two neighbouring communities which had not an upper secondary school of their own (Statistics from 2010, the schools own statistics). The average income and proportion of highly educated citizens and unemployment rates were below the average in the country and School 1, but slightly higher than School 3 (Statistics Sweden,

4. METHOD

2012). Marks were also lower than those earned at School 1, both on the vocational programmes and programmes preparatory for higher education. Concerning ethnic background, the proportion was somewhat similar to the situation at School 1, and about 10% of the inhabitants in the municipality were born outside Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2012), and in most classes there were, according to the teachers, about 10-20% immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

I observed six teachers at both programs that were preparatory for higher education and vocational programs. The Natural Science Programme [Swedish: *Naturvetenskapliga programmet*] and Social Science Programme [Swedish: *Sambällsvetenskapliga programmet*], Art, Music and Drama Programme [Swedish: *Estetiska programmet*] and a local variation of the Technology Programme [Swedish: *Teknikprogrammet*] were the programs preparatory for higher education I observed at this school. The vocational programs were the Electrical and Energy Programme [Swedish: *Elprogrammet*] Business and Administration Programme [Swedish: *Handelsprogrammet*] and Construction and Installation Programme [Swedish: *Byggprogrammet*]. At this school I spent six weeks during the autumn of 2011 and participated in 56 lessons that varied in length from 40 minutes to 90 minutes.

School No. 3

School 3 was situated in a medium-sized Swedish town and had about 1,100 students attending nine national programmes or introductory programmes for students who are not eligible for a national programme. The school was located in a town that had long been dominated by various industries. Of the three schools in the current study, this school was located in a municipality that has the lowest average income, lowest educational level and a considerably higher proportion of unemployment and the youth-unemployment was among the highest in the country. Almost 20% of the inhabitants were born outside Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2012). In some classes on the Child Care and Recreation Programme and the Industry Engineering Programme more than half of the students were immigrants or descendants of immigrants, according to the teachers. The proportion was lower on other programs. The school had statistically the lowest marks of the three schools in this study. I observed three teachers in five classes on the Electrical and Energy Programme [Swedish: *Elprogrammet*], the Child Care and Recreation Programme [Swedish: *Barn- och Fritidsprogrammet*], the Industry Engineering Programme [Swedish:

Industriprogrammet], the Vehicle and Transport Programme [Swedish: *Fordonsprogrammet*] and the Technology Programme [Swedish: *Teknikprogrammet*]. During the spring of 2012, I spent six weeks at the school and participated in 31 lessons of various lengths, from 80-105 minutes.

Different programmes

Divided into different kinds of programs this overview of the participant observations at all three schools shows that I took part in 83 lessons at programs preparatory for higher education and 42 lessons at vocational programs:

Programs Preparatory for higher education	Lessons	Vocational program	Lessons
The Social Science Programme [<i>Samhällsvetenskapligt program</i>]	42	The Child Care and Recreation Programme [<i>Barn- och Fritidsprogrammet</i>]	16
The Technology Programme [<i>Teknikprogrammet</i>]	20	The Business and Administration Programme [<i>Handelsprogrammet</i>]	11
The Natural Science Programme [<i>Naturvetenskapligt program</i>],	17	The Electrical and Energy Programme [<i>Elprogrammet</i>]	9
The Art, Music and Drama Programme [<i>Estetiskt program</i>] (together with the Natural Science Programme)	4	The Construction and Installation Programme [<i>Byggprogrammet</i>]	3
		The Industry Engineering Programme [<i>Industriprogrammet</i>] together with The Vehicle and Transport Programme [<i>Fordonsprogrammet</i>]	3
Number of observed lessons	83		42

Fig 2. Overview of the observations

When I asked the teachers if they would agree to being part of the study my criterion for selection was that they should be certified teachers of RE; I was not concerned about which program they were teaching at this school year. That I participated at more lessons in programs that are preparatory for higher education is therefore merely coincidental.

4. METHOD

The teachers

I observed 13 teachers between the ages of 36-52: eight women and five men, all of whom were certified teachers of RE. They had been working as teachers of RE between 8-24 years. In Sweden the teaching degree required for teaching at upper secondary schools usually encompasses two teaching subjects and this group of teachers also taught in the subjects of Swedish, History, Civics, Spanish, English or Physical Education. Seven of the teachers taught only on programs preparatory for higher education, two only on vocational programs and four on both kinds of programs. For ethical reasons concerning respect for individuals' privacy and the individual protection requirement, the teachers are presented as a group so that the individual teacher or the specific class is not distinguishable.

Religion

The selection of schools can be discussed in relation to religiosity. Can these schools be described as typical or unusual in this sense? As mentioned, there is a prohibition against registering religious affiliation in Sweden, which is why there are no reliable statistics of religiosity at the municipal level. There are, however, surveys conducted at the national and regional level. According to these statistics, 78% are members of a religious organisation, 45% believe in God, 22% pray to God at least once a quarter, and 12% participate in a service or religious meeting at least once a quarter (Bromander, 2013). The region where the schools are situated has traditionally been described as a region where the population has a rather high level of religious activity (Hagevi, 1995). In the statistics this is however not distinguishable but the region can be characterised as an average region when it comes to religiosity. The level of religiosity in terms of membership in religious denominations correlates to national figures (Hagevi, 2002). One of the schools is, however, situated in an area where *Schartauanismen*, a rather strict orthodox branch within the Church of Sweden, had a strong hold in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but how this affects the present is hard to say. In this area the free churches also have slightly higher attendance rates than the national average. In the large city that one of the schools is situated, close to, the level of religiosity is slightly lower than in the national statistics.

The areas where the schools are situated are thus quite average concerning religiosity in measurable statistics. I however want to stress that this is a qualitative study, and I don't claim to have selected schools based on

representativeness. If the observations had been carried out in another region of Sweden, at another school or even in other classes, the results might have been slightly different. For example, the group composition in the classes, individuals and relations within the groups might affect how people talk in class. Nevertheless, the fact that I have conducted a rather extensive amount of observations in different classes strengthens the reliability of the results.

Implementation of the study

The participant observations

During the observations I usually arrived at the classroom together with the teacher. I tried to sit in the back, took out my folder where I had the blank sheets of paper that constituted my observation protocol, where I took notes on what was happening and said in class. I also took out my little audio recorder. What I wanted to record was whole-class discussions, lectures and on those occasions when the students would discuss different topics in smaller groups, not the entire lesson. In the beginning some students reacted to the audio recorder, but eventually they took no notice of it. They also asked what I was writing and got to read what I noted down. I maintained a low profile when the whole class was meeting. I did not participate in discussions if I was not asked to directly by someone, which occasionally happened. In those cases it was usually the teacher who asked me about some factual information since I am a Religious Education teacher, or students who worked with some assignment and figured out that I might be able help them with various tasks. Many of the teachers gave considerable space to the students' individual reflections and personal views and this was quite often done in smaller groups. When classes were involved in this type of discussion in small groups, I walked around and sat in different groups. In these cases, I had a more active role, asking questions about how they viewed the various phenomena related to the topic. On a few occasions I spoke with individual students, and these conversations had more the character of an interview. These were conducted in the classroom or in the spaces where students sat and worked. One teacher was interviewed in the staff room, and one in a neighbouring room. These conversations/interviews were recorded.

4. METHOD

Field Notes

In class I continuously recorded by hand what took place and was said. I also wrote down questions and reflections on things that attracted my attention. These notes were written on the computer every night, and became a tool and part of the process of trying to understand the classroom contexts and what took place in the classroom. These were often the basis for new questions to ask the teachers and students.

Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) describe field notes as fragmented, disjointed notes of high and low, in no particular logic, but that constituting part of a whole (the corpus). The researcher's seeing is of course selective, since he or she tries to see things that are relevant to the purpose. Field notes are therefore not a neutral representation of a sequence of events, but a description of how the researcher perceived things. Since I initially did not know what would be important I first aimed to write down as much as possible in order to "narrow down" and focus on more specific issues later in the process. But then again my attention was naturally guided by the study's overall aim, research questions and theoretical perspectives. As my research questions concern how the subject of RE is constructed in the interplay between content, teachers and students, my focus was first and foremost on what students and teachers said, the concrete words uttered during class. I also tried to write down my impressions, interpretations and analyses as a participant observer of how of the words came out in the specific classroom, how the subtle nuances of the words were perceived by different individuals sitting in the same room.

Audio files

In recent years it has become more common with audio and video recordings during the observations (Ball & Smith, 2007; Keating, 2007). If the purpose of the study is analysing communication with turn-taking, how linguistic expressions are used in positioning, testing boundaries, trying out different roles etc. the audio and video recordings help us to note precise words and the tone of voice used and for example silences become obvious. This kind of data that can be difficult to obtain through field notes (Keating, 2007).

At the same time there may be a risk to use this type of technology. It could mean that the researcher becomes distant and more of an observer than participant and therefore does not perceive meanings and nuances in the interactions. Since everything is stored on audio files, notes can also become less comprehensive and reflective when the researcher settles down and is

confident that “everything is saved”, which may impede the learning process of the researcher. I chose to conduct audio recordings of whole-class discussions, lectures and discussions in smaller groups to include how students and teachers talk about the subject matter, how they discuss, what perceptions dominate in the classroom and so on.

Teaching materials and examinations

During a lesson there is always an interplay between teachers, students and the subject matter. In cases where the students studied an excerpt from the textbook, a newspaper article, a poem or something else I always asked to receive a copy from the teacher. If the teacher wrote on the whiteboard I copied it in my notes. In cases where the students did tests I got these, and in three of the classes I also got the students written examinations, two in the form of a larger reflection assignment in which they were to formulate their own philosophy of life and in one case, a test on Islam.

Analysis

In the first empirical part of the thesis, discourses of religion, religions and worldviews articulated in the classroom practice were in focus. In the process of analysing the discourses, the model presented in *Figure 3* has been used:

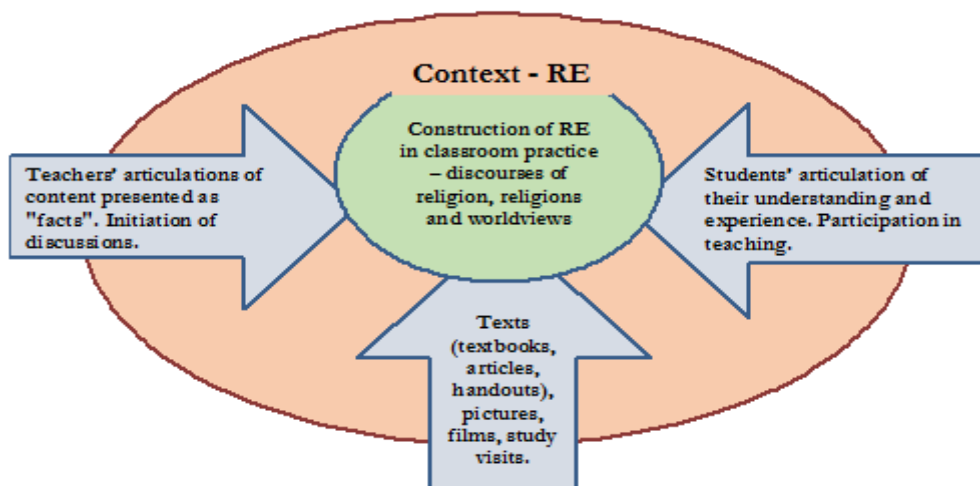


Fig 3. Model of analysing discourses of religion, religions and worldviews in the classroom practice

In this study the classroom is perceived as a discursive practice and the utterances of the teachers, the students, together with teaching materials have been treated as “text” that constitutes the discourses of RE.

4. METHOD

The main part of the audio recording of the lessons has been transcribed verbatim. There are a plethora of traditions relating to how one conducts transcriptions (Wetherell et al., 2001b; Woods, 2006). A guiding principle in the work with transcriptions is to consider the aim of the transcription. This study aims at analysing the content and meaning of articulations. Therefore the words of the dialogues have been written straight out, and I have not to any great extent used signs marking intonations, pauses, overlapping speech etc. as this would not contribute to a deeper understanding of the articulations. In those cases where someone interrupts another person and this affects the meaning or can be seen as an example of discursive struggle where the meaning is negotiated, I have, however, marked this. Capital letters have been used to mark if the person is really emphasising a word or raising his or her voice. In the transcriptions the teacher is marked *Teacher* and the students are named *Student 1*, *Student 2*, *Student 3* etc. in the order in which the different students start to take part in the classroom conversation that was a specifically recorded section of the lesson. This means that in the next transcribed audio file I again start with *Student 1*, *Student 2* etc. There were over 400 students participating in the lessons I took part in and it would have been very hard to relate specific articulations to a specific person and for example give all the students individual names in the transcriptions. In that case it would have been necessary to limit the observations to one or two classes. The aim of the study is not to find out how individuals relate to the content, but how the content is articulated in the context of the RE-classroom. One interesting feature is that there very seldom are more than 5-7 students actively participating in the whole-class conversation. If names occurred in the dialogues, these were changed in the transcriptions. A data program for qualitative analyses, *Atlas Ti*, has been used in order to handle the extensive text-material.

The analyses were carried out in different steps. In order to understand the discourses at play in the classroom, the analytical concepts of discursive struggle, floating signifier, articulation, articulation cluster and hegemony were used as tools for analysing the material. When in RE class, what were teachers and students discussing, what were the articulations about? The transcriptions were explored for articulations that came out as privileged, challenging articulations, variations and contradictions. What was articulated in different contexts and in relation to what content? The analysis also included observing

things that were not articulated.⁵³ This part of the analysis can be described as an inductive approach as it took the articulations of the classroom practice as the starting point. After this step neighbouring articulations were grouped together in clusters based on their content. Then the articulation clusters were analysed and related to examples of discourses outside the classrooms. There are no watertight bulkheads between the various parts of the analysis process, and in ethnographic studies the analysis process begins during the participation and the making of observations (Murchison, 2010). But essentially, the work after the completion of the observations was done using the above mentioned steps.

This is a qualitative study, which is why features such as frequency or how “typical” an articulation is are not the focus of this study. However, during the writing part of the process I struggled with how to present the complexity of the classroom in a clear and honest and thereby ethical way. The excerpts presented in the empirical chapters are articulations that in some way are concrete examples of what discourses were articulated in the classrooms and how the discourses were articulated. They are “typical” or “common” and reoccurring articulations and/or *had a major impact on the further discussion in the classroom*. They were not just said in passing, which nobody took further notice of.

Ethical considerations

What ethical requirements may be imposed on research, and what are the consequences of what can be researched? In my thesis, ethical reflections occupied much of my thought. Of course, my ambition has been to respond with respect to all individuals, teachers, students and others I have met during my data production at the schools and not to offend anyone. Simultaneously a researcher has to make ethical considerations in relation to the research and requirements one can demand of good research, such as Merton's norms, which include *communism* which concerns the right to have access to research findings, *universalism*, *disinterestedness* and *organized scepticism* (CUDOS) (Hermerén, 2011).

⁵³ Of course there are an infinite amount of opinions and views that are not pronounced in the classrooms. But based on this study's discourse analytical approach, one assumption is that the way people talk about different phenomena is limited both due to the context in which they are articulated, and because certain discourses become hegemonic (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This is also in line with the ethnographic search for the “nonobvious” where the researcher continuously oscillates between different perspectives (Murchison, 2010).

4. METHOD

All research has to find a balance between showing respect for the individual participant's privacy, the individual protection requirement, and the requirement that focuses on the benefit that society may have from the research (Hermerén, 2011). Murphy and Dingvall (2007) describe this as the tension between *consequentialist* vs. *deontological* approaches. The consequentialists focus on the outcome of the research, both for individuals and society, while a deontological position ensures the rights of individuals. Beach and Eriksson (2010) conclude that researchers with different theoretical bases emphasize the ethical aspects of their work. Feminist and postcolonial studies also highlight ethical dimensions - who describes reality, whose voices are reflected in the research, what is possible for me as a white female teacher and researcher to see, and what is hidden from me? I think this is a highly ethical and not just an epistemological question to consider.

The teachers and students gave their informed consent.^{54, 55} However, can participation be regarded as voluntary? I entered their mandatory class and as the teachers and the school management had given their consent, they could possibly feel that they were “forced” to participate. I did not perceive that they experienced the situation in this way, but have tried to be gentle in meetings with various individuals and have kept in mind the power relationship that exists between teachers and students (Miller & Bell, 2002). When carrying out observations in open environments there is always the risk of facing individuals I had not had the opportunity to inform, for example in the staff room and in hallways. In these situations I have tried to tell them who I am and what I am doing at school, but these situations are not the focus of this study as the focus of interest is related to the classroom practice.

Other ethical concerns I have had during the work with the thesis relate to how I as a teacher and researcher relate to the study. I'm a teacher and I know how incredibly complex and often difficult it is to stand in the classroom and handle the amount of views and situations that occur in the classroom and in many ways I feel a loyalty towards the teachers. How does this affect my understanding and my ability to discern and analyse variations and patterns in

⁵⁴ In correspondence with the lawyer of the University of Gothenburg (mail correspondence 8 September 2011) I was assured that she did not consider the subject of the research to be particularly sensitive as the observations were to be carried out during ordinary lessons, and due to the fact that everybody was above the age of 16, consent from the parents was not considered necessary in this study.

⁵⁵ See the section Access in this chapter for the way I handled those 25 students who did not give their consent to participate in the study.

classroom interaction as I also have obligations towards the scientificity of the research? In qualitative research the mix of roles and divided loyalties is a recognized problem (see eg Bell & Nutt, 2002). In ethnography the solution to this dilemma is oscillation between closeness and distance, previously discussed.

The Nuremberg code described that “the risks to test subjects must be minimized”. What are the “risks” of this study for the people involved? The study is based on meeting with teachers and students who shared their everyday life at school. Murphy and Dingwall (2007) point out that unlike medical research where the greatest “risk” to participants in studies occurs during the study itself, the largest “risk” in ethnographic studies is when results of research are published. With regard to observations made in open environments such as a school, there may be many who know that a person or group are participating in a study. Although no names were mentioned, and steps have been taken to ensure that no one should be recognizable, the participants may recognize themselves, and the question is whether they share the researcher’s descriptions and analysis of events and statements. Many times, the researcher develops relationships with those he or she observes follows, and a critical analysis might be regarded as a “betrayal” by the participants (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). A solution to this dilemma is that the researcher during the research process discusses the interpretations with informants or allows informants to read print-outs of interviews and observations and lets them comment on it. At the same time, it must be possible to come to conclusions informants do not share but still respond to the informants with respect. To relate reflexively in relation both to the role as a researcher, choice of methods and in treatment of others is central to all research.

This study is related to religion, which might be a sensitive subject. In Sweden one is not allowed to ask for or register a person’s religious affiliation.⁵⁶ During the participant observations, I was present in the classroom both during whole-class discussions, group assignments and individual tasks. The degree of my participation varied – sometimes I was just listening to the conversations. Sometimes I interacted with groups and individuals, asked them about their

⁵⁶ This is regulated in the law of *Ethical Review Act* (SFS 2003:460 and SFS 2008:192) and the *Data Protection Act* (SFS 1998:204). In the *Ethical Review Act* it is stated that if “sensitive personal data” is to be part of research, this must undergo a formal ethical review. In the *Data Protection Act* religious and philosophical convictions (SFS 198:204 § 13) are together with racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, trade union membership and data concerning health or sex life, considered sensitive personal data.

4. METHOD

opinions, about the subject content and their views on related matters. I never asked the students about their religious affiliation, but in smaller groups and individually, both when I was participating in the conversation and not, this information was often articulated.

During the field work a principle expressed by one informant of Beach and Eriksson (2010) has been a guide:

Acting ethically means acting responsibly by taking in the world from another's point of view and acting towards this worldview in an acceptable way. For instance, would you like to be kept in the dark about a project that involved you in some way or was on your practice? No of course not. And would you want to be denied access to the knowledge produced or other things of value that might have developed from the work? No (Beach & Eriksson, 2010, p. 132).

To remain reflexive of my own role and position in the field work, in methodological choices made and in response to others has been an aspiration. In addition, I have maintained openness to the informants about aims and methods.

5. “I am neutral!” - A secularist discourse

This and the two following empirical chapters will focus on the first two research questions and analyse the content of the discourses of religion, religions and worldviews in the context of Religious Education in the classroom practice. What is highlighted when religion, religions and worldviews are discussed, and how is it talked about? However, everything is articulated in a certain way, and how something is articulated has consequences for how it is perceived, which is why questions of what and how are not separable. The last empirical chapter (Chapter 8) focuses on how two different educational discourses affect RE, and thus more clearly emphasise questions of how the discourses are articulated. The third research question concerning implications of the discourses will be expounded upon under the final section of each chapter and further elaborated on in the concluding discussion.

A secularist discourse has appeared in all classrooms, both when talking about religion in general, about specific religions and about ethics. Western society, so also Sweden, is greatly influenced by Enlightenment ideas and traditions of thought. In this philosophical tradition, secularity/secularism⁵⁷ constitutes a key element, and this was apparent in the empirical material. In the following section, it will be shown how the secularist discourse emerged in the classroom practice. The discourse analytical perspective states that there is a continuously ongoing discursive struggle between different ways of speaking in order to pin down, to fixate the meaning of the discourse. When this happens, this way of speaking appears as obvious and natural and that way of speaking can be described as hegemonic. This means that alternative ways of speaking are excluded. In concrete terms, the subject of analysis is the articulations of teachers and students in the RE-classroom, which can be seen as interrelated in various ways and giving them significance and meaning within the discourse. The analyses of the classroom observations reveals how the cluster of articulations are linked (Howarth, 2000; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The secularist discourse was constructed through clusters

⁵⁷ For a distinction of the concepts see for example Scharffs (2011).

articulation of *Prime time of history*, *Diversity of views*, *A neutral position*, *Criticism of religion*, *Science and faith*, *Individualism*, *Modern myths*, “*Man is the measure of all things*” and *Religion as a private matter*.

Prime time of history

A “chronocentric” view of history was articulated both by teachers and students and constructed religion as a passed stage in history. Religious was something people used to be in previous historical periods, before one knew better.

When religion was discussed during the RE-lessons there was a constant comparison between religion in history and religion (or non-religion) in contemporary society. As a consequence an image of religion emerged that associated religion with history rather than the modern contemporary society:

Student: In the past, in the eighteenth century or so, or I think ... religion seeks power. One guesses at what has happened, and the way they got power over people who didn't know very much. That's how it is in Islam ... so we think that it is so today as well. It is still like that. But now we are secularized and so we don't need religion in that way. Religion told us what to do, how we should live, but there is no need for that anymore.

Elev: Förr, på 1700-talet ungefär, eller jag tror... religion vill ha makt. Man gissar sig till vad som hänt, och på det sättet tog man makten över folk som inte visste så mycket. Så är det i islam... så vi tror att det är så idag också. Det sitter i. Men nu är vi sekulariserade och då så behöver vi inte religionen på det sättet. Religionen talade om vad vi ska göra, hur vi ska leva, men det behöver man inte längre.

Excerpt 1 (audio-file 28 September 2011).

This excerpt originates from a discussion about what religion might be.⁵⁸ This student argued that religion previously played an important role in society, but does not anymore. He associated religion with the exercise of power and tampering with people who could be manipulated because of their ignorance. It is also implied that this is how it works in Islam even today and thus that

⁵⁸ In all classrooms the teaching included this kind of task where the students were instructed to associate and reflect about what religion “is”, how the concept of religion might be understood, and what the students associated with the word religion. In most cases this was followed by a lecture including different definitions of religion and a presentation of different branches of the science of religious studies: history of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, philosophy of religion, theology, etc. This way of teaching – to begin with students' preconceptions and then introduce the new knowledge and new concepts – is generally a standard teaching model in the Swedish school system that is influenced by cognitive and socio-cultural beliefs about learning (Gredler, 2005; Lundgren, Säljö, & Liberg, 2012).

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Islam in this way is a historical remnant. That religion was associated with lack of knowledge and oppression was a common perception expressed in the classrooms, and also indicates a view of contemporary society as more enlightened than the dark unenlightened past.

The following excerpt brings up the same line of thought as the previous, but also stresses individualism, independence and a morality that emphasizes human dignity as phenomenon associated with our time:

Student: I think, the whole society was more brutal in the past, like when executing people one hitched them to two horses and let them like run, that is very brutal. And they didn't care so much about the specific person, not the individual. But then, as we have progressed, we have done it in the view of others as well, that you care about others, and don't just lump them together but each person is unique and special. So I think it helps a lot and we have also learned more about morality and what is right and wrong and that you do not do certain things. While in the past it was a little more about fighting and plundering and ... [...] Now its money and stuff, though they sometimes still hide behind their faith. That's what I think, society or the world has progressed so far, so I do not understand why still, why there are so many still living in the past, who are like this, really extreme, I really don't understand that.

Excerpt 2 (audio-file 13 October 2011).

Elev: Jag tror att, alltså, hela samhället var ju mer brutalt förr, typ när man avrättade människor då spände man fast dom i två olika hästar och lät dom springa liksom, det är ju så här väldigt brutalt. Och man brydde sig inte så mycket om den enskilda människan, inte om individen. Men sen så när vi har gått framåt så har vi ju gjort det i synen på andra också, att man bryr sig om andra, och det är inte bara en klump, utan varje människa är unik och speciell. Så jag tror att det bidrar väldigt mycket och så har man också lärt sig mer om moral och vad som är rätt och fel och att man inte gör vissa saker. Medans förr i tiden var det ju lite mer att man krigade och plundrade och... [...] Nu är det ju pengar och grejer, fast dom gömmer sig fortfarande ibland bakom sin tro. Det är det jag tänker, att samhället eller världen har gått så mycket framåt, så jag fattar inte varför fortfarande, varför så många lever kvar, som är så här, verkligen extrema, det förstår jag mig verkligen inte på.

This excerpt too originated from a discussion about what religion "is". Religion was in these discussions mainly associated with the exercise of power over people who are less well-informed, and religion was possibly something that filled a function in the past. Now, as the development has progressed, these students claimed that there is no need for religion and they had a hard time understanding why people still cling to these ideas. Interesting to note is that the first student specifically mentions Islam and the second one mentions extremists as somehow "left" in an antiquated time. One view articulated by students and teachers was that religion might possibly have had a rational

function in history from an evolutionary perspective,⁵⁹ but this stage we have passed, which is why rational and sensible behaviour and beliefs in our time do not comprise anything belonging to the religious sphere. Through these articulations, the notion that we now live in an age where evolution has almost reached its perfection is consolidated.

The idea that “other people” (non-Western) are stuck in an earlier stage of development, Fabian (2002) highlights to be dominant in anthropological research and part of articulations that contributed to create the “researched people” as “the Other”. Their religiosity was thus of a more primitive kind than the religiosity of the researcher, and there are traces of these views in the classroom discourse. Not surprisingly, studies confirm that this view is also common among Swedish adolescents (cf. von Brömssen, 2003, 2009). The modern project, that has strongly influenced the worldview in the West has roots in the Enlightenment and involves a view of time and historical evolution as a continual movement forward, upward, to higher altitudes and new levels of development and the people living now accordingly are more rational, logical and sensible than previous generations (Fabian, 2002; Liedman, 1999). Religion is consequently associated with everything opposite, and this view was articulated in the classrooms. Through the articulations in the classrooms it was indicated that people who for some reason still believe and cling to religious beliefs thus belong to lower stages of evolution that dominated in earlier historical periods and that we now live in the prime time of history where religion is a passed stage.

Diversity of views

That we live in a society where different views are represented and that nothing is more accurate than anything else was articulated as a fact in the classrooms. In relation to what was described as “the religion’s exclusive truth claims”, diversity and pluralism were articulated as problematic for religious people. Accordingly, religion and religious people were associated with intolerance while non-believers hence were associated with tolerance. The downside of diversity was articulated as uncertainty.

⁵⁹ See Excerpt 18.

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

The claim that there could be just one truth was seen as an obsolete and almost ridiculous idea, and a consequence of the ignorance and lack of knowledge of ancient times that we today are "cured" of. Simultaneously, the secularist discourse limited possible variations in views. One class who discussed what Luther's theses would have contained if he had posted his theses today, related this to diversity of views in contemporary society:

Teacher: Those questions you got, are there some that you definitely cannot find the answer to?

Student 1: "If Luther were active today, what would his theses be about, do you think"? That nobody believes in God anymore?

Teacher: What were the theses about? Anders?

Student 2: But what would his theses be about, if he were alive today?

Teacher: Yes, that's right. But I cannot help you with this, you have to figure it out yourselves.

Student 2: But I do not believe in God, there's evidence that Jesus did not create the earth or anything. Just as an example. There's evidence of that, right?

Teacher: So you're saying that his theories were about such concrete things that have already been solved today now so there's like nothing?

Student 2: I do not know what they're all about!

Student 3: Wasn't he like a ... theo ... theologian or something like that? Isn't it those who believe in the message and the ... well, religion? He based it on things like that, but we don't believe that is the truth you could say. And now we know much more about all the other religions and so, now we know more

Teacher: Would he have had as much success today if he had gone on to re-formulate or to reinterpret the scriptures?

Student 3: No

Student 1: No

Teacher: Why not?

Student 1: Much easier to believe in different things now

Teacher: Mm, there's an openness now that makes it like very difficult to become an authority or be a leader today, right? And as you so rightly said, there are of course MANY

Lärare: Dom frågorna ni fick, finns det några som ni absolut inte hittar svar på?

Elev 1: "Om Luther vore verksam idag vad skulle hans teser handla om tror du"? Att man inte tror på Gud längre?

Lärare: Vad handlade teserna om? Anders?

Elev 2: Men vad skulle hans teser handla om, om han levde idag?

Lärare: Ja, just det. Men det kan ju inte jag hjälpa er med, det måste ni tänka ut själva.

Elev 2: Men jag tror ju inte på Gud, det finns ju bevis för att Jesus inte skapade jorden eller så, till exempel. Det finns ju bevis för det.

Lärare: Så du menar att hans teser handlade om så konkreta saker som redan är lösta idag nu så att det finns liksom ingenting?

Elev 2: Jag vet inte vad dom handlar om!

Elev 3: Var inte han sån... teo... teolog eller nåt sånt? Är det inte dom som tror på ett budskap och... ja religion? Han baserade det på sånt, men vi tror ju inte att det är, ja sanning om man säger så. Och nu vet man mycket mer om alla andra religioner och så, nu vet man mer

Lärare: Hade han haft lika mycket framgång idag om han hade gett sig på att formulera om eller tolka om skrifterna?

Elev 3: Nej

Elev 1: Nej

Lärare: Varför inte då?

Elev 1: Mycket lättare att tro olika nu

Lärare: Mm, det finns en öppenhet nu som gör att det liksom det blir jättesvårt att bli en myndighet eller liksom en tongivare idag eller hur? Och som ni mycket riktigt säger så finns det ju MÅNGA olika religioner. Och speciellt härifrån [Sverige] så har vi liksom översikt, överblick över många religioner.

different religions. And especially from here [*in Sweden*], we have an overview of many religions.

Excerpt 3 (audio-file 8 November 2011).

A natural premise in the secularist discourse seems to be a non-religious position. In the dialogue several of the students stated that “nobody believes in God anymore” and “I don’t believe in God” and these articulations were used as neutrality markers despite the fact that they say that it is “easier to believe in different things now”. Neutrality markers can be specific linguistic expressions that contribute to an articulation seeming obvious and natural. The use of the Swedish words “*ju*” [of course] and “*vi*” [we] in the above excerpt has this function of creating a shared understanding – “we”, in this classroom take it for granted that none of us believe in God. This dialogue illustrates some seemingly contradictory aspects of the secularist discourse and the word “believe” can be seen as a floating signifier. In the secularist discourse notions of non-religious positions are strong, but so are notions of individualism, freedom of choice, and diversity. The word “believe” is used both with reference to a shared non-religious worldview and linked to reliable (and possibly scientific?) proof of a specific view, that “Jesus did not create the world”. The word is also used with reference to a relativistic stance, that it is possible to believe different things in the modern, pluralistic world, compared to the old days where there only existed one way of believing and one truth. The meaning of the word “believe” in the secularist discourse is not fixed, and one possible interpretation of this ambiguity within the secularist discourse is that it is possible to believe in different things in contemporary Sweden, as long as it encompasses the non-religious worldview.

The existence of parallel ways of interpreting the world was articulated as self-evident (cf. Tylor, 2007) and during all observations there was never any discussion about this point - “I have the right to my opinions and so has everybody else”. The premise that all humans have the right to think and believe whatever they wish was articulated at a theoretical level, although in practice, concerning concrete issues, the level of tolerance of divergent opinions was lower in many cases. For instance, the student in the above excerpt assumes that an atheistic, non-religious position is embraced by “us” enlightened modern people. Another way to describe this is that students partly learned what they were supposed to say in school, but they had not appropriated this

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

discourse of tolerance and their utterances can to some extent be described as unreflective adherence.

Another aspect of the secularist discourse related to diversity of views was disorientation – the students articulated that they simply did not know what to think:

Student: So in the olden days one used to be more confident, that [*religion*] was the only thing available. Now nobody knows what is true, that is, you cannot know that it's the truth, instead, one can only speculate as to what to believe, if you believe that it's true or not.

Elev: Alltså, förr var man la säkrare, det var det [*religionen*] som fanns. Nu finns ingen som vet vad som är sant, alltså, man kan inte veta att det är sant, utan man kan bara spekulera i vad man tror, om man tror att det är sant eller inte.

Excerpt 4 (audio-file 7 October 2011).

This student associates uncertainty and relativism with modern society, and compared this to past times when religion presented one unquestionable truth. However, not choosing was not an option – that everybody must create their own worldview was emphasized in the classroom practice in relation to several topics of discussion. The emphasis was on the individual act of choosing and thus constructing the individual worldview, rather than having a consciously articulated worldview. Nevertheless, even if you create your own worldview, that worldview had nothing to do with truth or exclusive truth claims, only speculation. This had, as will be shown in this chapter, implications for how religion was constructed discursively in the classroom. One could imagine that this would lead to a curiosity about how other people think, but in many cases students instead articulated indifference towards others, “people may well believe what they want, as long as I can believe what I want”.

Some students argued that there might be contradictions in relation to groups that they perceived as more sure and confident in their beliefs. One student formulated this opinion as follows:

Student: Like, many Christians probably feel that they are losing their grip. Even the Church of Sweden alone has lost a lot of grip lately, the Catholics are losing trust also... and immigration, there are more immigrants, and people probably feel threatened by that too, they have lost their identity, there is an identity crisis for us in the West.

Elev: Typ många kristna känner nog att man tappar fotfästet. Bara svenska kyrkan tappat massa fotfäste nu bara det senaste, katolikerna tappar ju också förtroende... och invandringen, det blir ändå mer invandrare, och folk känner sig nog hotade av det också, de har förlorat i sin identitet, det blir ju alltså en identitetskris för oss i västvärlden.

Excerpt 5 (audio-file 14 October 2011).

The ambiguity and vagueness of beliefs were not perceived as a problem until interacting with other groups. Implicit in this student's reasoning is that immigrants bring with them alternative religions and views. Then the uncertainty became evident to the individual and articulated as a problem.

Opinions and perceptions concerning diversity articulated in the classrooms correspond to some of modern society's characteristics which imply a (historically comparable) great freedom to choose our lives but hence choosing also becomes an inescapable requirement (cf. Giddens, 1991; Ziehe, 1993). Simultaneously, as expressed by the student in Excerpt 4, the "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2001, 2006) also entails some levels of loneliness when the responsibility rests heavily on the individual for matters that previous generations could turn to the history and culture for guidance. The excerpts in this section can be seen in light of this and today people's minds are marked to a much greater extent by the fact that we live in an ever changing society which means that the present is the only thing we can really be sure about.⁶⁰ The student's articulations about living in a society where there exist parallel and competing worldviews can also be seen as a sign of internalization of the pluralistic society. Dealing with uncertainty and a feeling of an ever-changing environment are some of modern society's hallmarks. The concept "liquid modernity" has been used to describe the anxiety and the feeling that there is nothing permanent to relate to (Bauman, 2001, 2006). The existence of many parallel truths was apparent in the classroom practice and might be understood as a sign of secularity (cf. Tylor, 2007). However, when the secularist discourse was at play in the classroom, the diversity was limited to non-religious views.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the conditions for the individual in late modernity/postmodernity see for example Bauman (2001) or Giddens (1991).

A neutral position

In the classrooms of RE a non-religious, sometimes atheistic, position was considered a "neutral" and "objective" position relative to the content of the subject.

Non-religious views seen as neutral

In the secularist discourse, a non-religious position is considered an unbiased and objective point of view. In the following excerpt the students were given an assignment to define the word "secular":

Student 1: Secular? It's non-religious.

Student 2: Non-religious?

Student 1: Yes

Student 2: But must it have to do with religion? Could it not be that it is optional, not optional but ...

Student 3: I wrote objective too...

Student 1: Like, secular, I think, it is a strange word, but like multi-dimensional, that it should not be just one focus on something. And when it comes to religion, one should be allowed to have different religions in school.

Student 3: I have no idea what secular is. I thought it said secondary.

Teacher: They sometimes say that Sweden is secular.

Student 1: Well, yes, I understand vaguely what it means, but I cannot define the word.

Student 3: Non-religious objective I have written, it works, right?

Teacher: Yes, or, a little like this that religion doesn't matter so much in society, so differentiating between religion and...

Student 1: Yes, objective is a good word.

Elev 1: Sekulär? Det är ju ickereligiös.

Elev 2: Ickereligiös?

Elev 1: Ja

Elev 2: Men måste det vara religion? Kan det inte vara att det är valfritt, inte valfritt, men...

Elev 3: Jag skrev objektiv också...

Elev 1: Alltså sekulär tänker jag, det är ett konstigt ord, men typ flersidig, att det inte ska vara just en inriktning på nånting. Och när det gäller religion så att man liksom ska få ha olika religioner i skolan.

Elev 3: Jag har ingen aning om vad sekulär är. Jag trodde det stod sekundär.

Lärare: Man brukar ibland säga att Sverige är sekulariserat.

Elev 1: Jamen, ja, jag förstår ungefär vad det betyder, men jag kan inte definiera ordet.

Elev 3: Ickereligiös objektiv har jag skrivit, funkar det eller?

Lärare: Ja, eller, lite så här att religion inte spelar så stor roll i samhället, så man skiljer på religion och...

Elev 1: Ja, objektiv är ett bra ord.

Excerpt 6 (audio-file 14 October 2011).

As shown in this dialogue, the students had a rather vague idea about the meaning of the term "secular", but they associated it with such words as non-religious and objectivity. The teacher tried to bring in aspects of religiosity in society into the discussion, but the students did not seem to understand how this was related. In their reasoning secular became synonymous with non-religious and objectivity.

To consider oneself a non-believer was perceived as a neutral position in relation to religion and religions. In the following excerpt some students discussed how they saw their relationship to religion:

Student 2: But as for me, I don't follow any religion, but I go by what I think!

Student 4: Yes

Student 2: Religions are more like people who just blurt out a load of things that you yourself don't believe in.

Student 1: I'm neutral!

Student 4: Exactly!

Elev 2: Men för mig, jag går inte efter nån religion utan jag går efter det JAG tror!

Elev 4: Ja

Elev 2: För religioner är lite mera människor som häver ur sig en massa som man själv inte tror på.

Elev 1: Jag är neutral!

Elev 4: Precis!

Excerpt 7 (audio-file 2 April 2012)

Their own position was thus described as “neutral” and thereby legitimate as the word neutral in the classrooms was loaded with positive connotations, while religious people ”just blurt out a load of things”.

To talk about religion from a non-religious perspective represented the natural way to talk about religion. Adhering to religion was articulated as a biased position in comparison with a non-religious or atheistic position:

Student 3: I thought about it like this, that if you are not exposed to religion until you're like 15 or something and introduced then, how many people would be religious then? Because people are INDOCTRINATED from the time they are little.

[...]

Student 1: I would not say that atheism is a faith, rather it is a non-belief. Then if you want to choose to believe in something so one can always do that of course, but...

Elev 3: Jag tänkte det, att om man inte utsätts för religion tills man är typ 15 eller nånting och introduceras då, hur många som skulle vara religiösa då? Eftersom man INDOKTRINERAS från det att man är liten.

[...]

Elev 1: Jag skulle ju inte säga att ateismen är en tro utan att det är en icke-tro. Sen ifall man vill välja att tro på nånting så får man ju så klart göra det, men...

Excerpt 8 (audio-file 14 March 2012).

These students, who a few minutes earlier expressed that they saw themselves as atheists, seem to say that if a child under 15 comes in contact with religion, there is a strong influence, indoctrination, which makes it difficult to see clearly. The word “indoctrination” is in this context loaded with negative connotations. That the children then would be socialized into some other worldview, such as a secular or atheistic worldview, was an interpretation these students did not share. This view, i.e. religion involves an influence of a special kind that cannot be compared with any other form of influence, recurred in the various classrooms. That contact with the non-religious worldview would mean a

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

similar form of influence but in another direction, none of the students agreed with. Put differently, the neutral comprised the secular. The construct of religion in the classroom was also done by negation, naming what it is *not* (make your own choices, individualism, neutral etc.) in binary opposites. Thereby articulations about religion do not just discursively construct religion, but also the secular worldview.

Atheism as neutrality

By assuming that the non-religious worldview is a neutral perspective, atheism was also made neutral. An indication of this is that both teachers⁶¹ and students quite often stated their atheistic position in whole-class discussions. Atheistic interpretations of life were, compared to other positions, articulated in a way that made them seem obvious:

Teacher: I have an atheistic interpretation of life, I think that when life is over, it's over. But one can think differently about this. I am extreme in this respect, I do not celebrate Christmas or other religious holidays, some think that is strange.

Lärare: Jag har ju en ateistisk livstolkning, jag tror ju att när livet är slut så är det slut. Men om det kan man ju tänka olika. Jag är ju extrem i det, jag firar inte jul eller andra religiösa högtider, det tycker ju en del är konstigt.

Excerpt 9 (audio-file 26 October 2011).

Student 1: Is there anybody here that is a believer?

Elev 1: Är det nån här som är troende?

Student 2: I think that...

Elev 2: Jag tror att...

Student 3: I'm not like, I'm not a believer, I don't know. I haven't like had the energy yet to think about that

Elev 3: Alltså jag är inte så här, jag är inte troende, utan jag vet inte. Jag har typ inte orkat lägga tid på den tanken än typ

Student 4: I'm an atheist!

Elev 4: Jag är ateist!

Student 1: My parents are like this super-non-Christian, like this totally extreme. So for me it's like this, it's not very nice to say this, but I feel like this, the Christians, it is unintelligent. I really think so!

Elev 1: Mina föräldrar är så här superokristna, så här helt extremt typ. Så jag har det här så här, det är lite taskigt att säga, men jag tycker så här, dom kristna, det är ointelligent. Jag tycker verkligen det!

Excerpt 10 (audio-file 13 October 2011)

⁶¹ Of the 13 teachers one presented herself as Christian and said that she usually told her students that she was, but this she had mentioned to the students before I started my observation and she did not mention this in class when I was present. Another teacher got the question in class if she was a Christian believer and answered evasive that she found many of the thoughts appealing, but that she didn't attend services regularly, only on Christmas Eve. One described himself in class as agnostic and four described themselves in the classes as atheists. The others did not discuss the issue. For a discussion of use of personal religious experiences as RE-teacher, see for example Everington (2014, 2015) Löfstedt (2013).

In the discussion in excerpt 10 two of the students take an atheistic position, and religiosity was associated with unintelligence. To take a position as atheist was never questioned or even asked about. Unlike those (few) who positioned themselves as religious within a certain tradition, students and teachers who took an atheistic position did not get questions about how they viewed the world or why they had taken this position.

In one of the classes the very start of the RE-course consisted of a lecture about perception psychology with a person who was presented as “a neuroscientist from the University”.⁶² This researcher took a clearly atheistic position:

External lecturer: We learn things. The brain's job is to learn. Babies recognize their parents' voices already at birth. The brain begins to learn from the beginning. The last thing we learn in life - if we are Christians, we meet the light in the tunnel. Or like me, who is an atheist, I will see that – shit -- I was right!
[Collective laughter from the class.]

Extern föreläsare: Vi lär oss saker. Hjärnans uppgift är att lära sig. Bebisar känner igen föräldrarnas röster redan när de föds. Hjärnan börjar lära sig från början. Det sista vi lär oss i livet – om vi är kristna möter vi ljuset i tunneln. Eller som jag, som är ateist, jag kommer att se att – shit – jag hade rätt!
[Allmänt skratt i klassen].

Excerpt 11 (audio-file 26 September 2011).

In the following lesson, there was a discussion about the lecture, but that he was talking from an atheist point of view was not discussed or even mentioned. Atheism was frequently articulated as a neutral and objective approach in relation to religion. It was a legitimate position in the classroom for both teachers and students (even if the teacher in Excerpt 9 describes her position as “extreme”). The invited researcher and the teachers’ declarations of their atheistic beliefs in the above excerpt are also examples of how the secularist discourse was enforced as their utterances might have a special authority in the classroom.

Atheism as normality

A group of students asked their teacher when they would get to read about atheism. When asked why they wanted to learn about atheism, one of the students responded:

⁶² To invite experts from various fields to speak to a class is not unusual in the Swedish school - it can be representatives of companies, organizations, political parties or religious representatives.

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Student 1: Yes, it [atheism] is interesting, it's a unique thing, it's relevant today because there are many people who, or yes, convert to -- you can't really say it, because there's no ... I get, I do not like to call it atheism, I like to call it being normal instead, it's a better way to put it.

Elev 1: Ja, det [ateism] är ju intressant, det är ju en unik grej, det är ju relevant idag för det är ju många som, eller ja, konverterar till det kan man ju inte säga, för det är ju ingen... Jag får, jag tycker inte om att kalla det ateism, jag tycker om att kalla det att vara normal istället, det är ju ett bättre sätt att säga det.

Excerpt 12 (audio-file 09 November 2011).

The student in excerpt 12 equates atheism with being normal. Why he is reluctant to call it atheism is not apparent, maybe because it signals that it is one of many worldviews and he sees his position as self-evident. Normality is always created in relation to the deviant, abnormal. In this context normal - religious were constructed as binary opposites.

In the classroom atheism was associated with truth and clarity of vision, to upright and steadily face the truth even if it is not “fun”, like the conviction that there is no continuation of life after death, or that there is no divine power to turn to when life is difficult. But atheism wasn't discussed as a specific worldview *per se* but as the antithesis of religion. However, humanism was part of the teaching content in some classrooms. In one of these classes the teacher screened a film *Humanisterna: The movie* by Henrik Thomé (2009) produced by the Swedish Humanist Association, (Humanisterna 2015).⁶³ The film aims at describing the organization's criticism of religion and their motives for this criticism. The film criticizes religion as a social phenomenon and advocates secularism as the model of a modern society. In the film religiosity is more or less equated with fundamentalism and extremism; consequently, religion is a threat to human rights and an open democratic society. The film was shown, but then lesson time ran out and there was no follow-up discussion neither during this nor the following lessons. Atheism in its own right was never made explicit or discussed in relation to the movie or, to my knowledge, at any other time during the course.

The idea that a secular position in relation to religion would be tantamount to a neutral position has its roots in the Enlightenment view of religion. Then the critique of religion and a secular position was part of the criticisms of the regime

⁶³ The Swedish Humanist Association [Swedish: *Humanisterna*] is the largest humanist organisation in Sweden. Their main aim is to work for a completely secular society, free of religious oppression, discrimination and other infringements on human rights (Humanisterna, 2015). For an analysis of the view of religion of the Swedish Humanist Society, see for example Gerle (2010).

and existing power structures, but conditions for criticism of religions differs in many respects in contemporary pluralistic and globalized society compared to the 1700s autocratic France. That teachers and students to a significantly higher extent articulated in whole-class discussions that they were atheists, compared to a religious identity can be interpreted in several ways. First, it might have been the case that the numbers of atheists were much larger, and if that is so, it is a sign of secularity in itself. However, the fact that it was unusual for students to openly position themselves as religious, although in small groups and in private conversations could say that they saw themselves as Christians, Muslims, or Jehovah's Witnesses, can be interpreted as an expression of the secularist discourse limiting the ability to take positions that were not secular. In every classroom, there were students who both described themselves as believers or religiously oriented in a more general sense, as well as students who positioned themselves by saying that they were members of various churches or active in various religious organizations. But this they kept quiet about in whole-class discussions. However, it was much more common for students, to articulate that they saw themselves as atheists when they were speaking to the whole class. This was also the case for the teachers. From a discourse analytical point of view there are no neutral positions, but a secularist position also represents an approach and an attitude to the subject (Asad et al., 2013).

Criticism of Religion

To discuss the content of RE critically and problematize different perspectives on religion and religions was a central feature in the RE classroom practice. However, the criticism was sometimes of a condescending nature.

Critical thinking

The competency of critical thinking was highly regarded both by teachers and students and it is also emphasized in the curricula that the teaching in all subjects should help students to develop critical thinking. In the context of RE one teacher described the relation between spirituality and critical thinking in this way:

Teacher: But, we are perhaps spiritual in a completely different way than the rest of the world. Above all, also, [Sweden is] a country where one is very critical, because it is

Lärare: Men, vi är kanske andliga på ett helt annat sätt än vad resten av världen är. Framförallt också, [Sverige är] ett land där man är väldigt kritisk, för det är självklart

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

obviously also a part of this ... about philosophies of life, it's also the fact that you obviously have to be allowed to be critical of philosophies of life, you have to critically examine them and see what they are about, what they say. Indeed, we have to be critical of all sorts of narratives about how we should live our lives,

också en del av den här... om livsåskådningar, det är också att man givetvis måste få vara kritisk mot livsåskådningar, man måste få kritiskt granska dom och se vad dom handlar om, vad dom säger. Alla typer av berättelser om hur vi ska leva våra liv måste vi ju vara kritiska mot.

Excerpt 13 (audio-file 30 September 2011).

This excerpt seems to indicate that the self-image includes the notion that “here in Sweden we are critical and examine thoughts and ideas carefully”. Several of the teachers tried, as in the example above, to make the students reflect on “all sorts of stories about how we should live our lives”. The formulations in curricula regarding critical thinking aim to develop the student’s ability to carry out a scientific analysis, to critically analyse and evaluate facts and circumstances, and can in this regard be seen as a contribution to the creation of meaning or “an offer of meaning” (cf. Englund 1997). It is however worth noting that the discussion about critical thinking seems to be based on a notion that it proceeds from a neutral position.

The content of criticism in the classroom was articulated through: highlighting “anomalies” that occur in the name of religion as terrorism, oppression of women etc.; problematizing the concept of religion as such; discussing equality, abortion, homosexuality etc.; exemplification of how different religious groups perceive these things so as to give students an idea of how religion is used and appears in different contexts. The problem of theodicy was discussed and how different branches, religious and non-religious, perceive free will, determinism, the possible existence of a human soul, and the moral responsibilities of humans. Articulations concerning these subjects can be seen as part of the cluster of articulations of Criticism of religion, which comprised a central part of the secularist discourse.

To criticize

In some contexts, critical thinking and to critically examine were equated with criticizing as in complaining and condemning. There was in many classrooms a permissive climate for dropping negative comments about religion and religious people. The following “jokes” were articulated in a specific classroom, but circulated in several of the classrooms in this study:

“God is like Santa Claus, he does not exist, but some believe that he does!”

“The Bible is toilet paper, the Qur'an is toilet paper, and what have the Jews? Toilet rolls?”⁶⁴

Excerpt 14 (from field notes 2 March 2012).

These kinds of comments were articulated as jokes and generated laughter. Some teachers did not hear the comments, some allowed this type of comment to pass. Others tried to discuss them and conclude that we all think differently, what is sacred to someone may not be sacred to someone else. In the criticism of religion, different religions were represented in different ways. In the following excerpt, religiosity was associated with mental illness and insanity, but Buddhism goes free from criticism. The excerpt originates from a lesson where I talked to two students who were complaining about having to study RE:

Me: But isn't it exciting [*to study RE in order*] to understand how other people think?

Student 1: Well, not when you know how... Absolutely crazy! Like, if someone would come up to you and say “I have an imaginary friend and he tells me how I should live. If I'm nice to him, I get to live forever in a paradise”. Then he would, someone like that would be locked up then! But somehow it is acceptable simply because there are lot of people that do that. It's like group pressure. Because that is what religion is! Or Christianity anyway. Buddhism is the only religion that works. It's like, well: be nice! Don't 'kill anybody!

Student 2: Then you feel good!

Student 1: Yes, it's good not to do that. There is no God and no ... Yeah stupid fucking holy war or some shit like that! It's just: “Be nice, then everything will be fine”. That's true too...

Jag: Men är det inte spännande [*att läsa religionskunskap för*] att se vad nån annan tänker då?

Elev 1: Alltså, inte när man vet hur ... Blindgalet! Alltså, tänk om nån skulle komma fram till dig och säga ”Jag har en lätsaskompis och han säger åt mig hur jag ska leva. Om jag är snäll mot honom så får jag leva för evigt i ett paradis”. Då skulle, man skulle spärras in då! Men på nåt sätt så är det acceptabelt bara för att det är massa som gör det. Det är typ gruppsytryck. För det är religion är! Eller kristendomen i alla fall. Buddhismen är den enda religionen som funkar. För det är ju liksom, ja: Var snäll! Döda inte nån!

Elev 2: Så mår du bra!

Elev 1: Ja, det är bra att inte göra det. Det är ingen Gud och inga... Ja dumma djävla heliga krig eller nån sån skit! Det är bara: ”Var snäll, så löser sig allting”. Det är ju sant också...

Excerpt 15 (audio-file 9 October 2011).

The student expressed here a critical position towards religion in general. It was however evident that the criticism of various religions took account of slightly

⁶⁴ The Swedish word [Swedish: *toa-rullar*] means *toilet-paper-rolls* and sounds similar to the Swedish word [Swedish: *tora-rullar*] which means *Torah-scrolls*. Cf. the classroom study of Osbeck and Lied (2011) where the very same “joke” occurs. They conclude that different kinds of speech-genre in the classroom determine the possibilities of learning.

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

different aspects.⁶⁵ Buddhism evades criticism as it in the students' reasoning not quite a religion since it doesn't involve a God. This representation of Buddhism is in line with a well-documented common representation of Buddhism in the Western world in general and Sweden in particular (Thurfjell, 2015).

Criticism that is not permitted

Many of the students expressed the opinion that it wasn't possible to criticize Islam in the same way as other religions. If you do, you will be accused of being a racist:

Student: Because if you say something that is offensive to them, you are considered a racist. That is what I think. It is so very difficult to express what you think when it is like this, just because it gets so damn weird what others think of us then.

Elev: För att om man säger nånting som är kränkande mot dom så anses man vara rasist. Så tycker jag. Det är så himla svårt att uttrycka sig vad man själv tycker när det är så här, bara för att då blir det så djävla konstigt vad andra tycker om oss då.

Excerpt 16 (audio-file 10 November 2011).

Student 1: No, because it gets very much like this, race sensitive and... we are very nice here ... And for them, there is a little extra mollycoddling for them than what we get as like militant atheists.

[Collective laughter in the group]

Student 1: I feel oppressed!

Me: So if you are militant Islamist, we mollycoddle you, but if you are a militant atheist, so, is that what you said?

Student 1: Actually a little! Yes, as I perceive it anyway

Me: Oh, okay. ... Then, in what way does one mollycoddle Muslims like that?

Student 2: Well, but that's because it, their faith is more important than my anti-beliefs, or what to call atheism.

Me: Do you think it is like that in Sweden?

Student 2: Yes it is so! Really so. Because I am like not allowed not say that they, they can say yes, you will burn in hell, but if I say that your God doesn't exist and you're an idiot to believes in it! Well then I am a racist who should, well, then I am a bad person

Elev 1: Nej, för det blir väldigt så här, raskänsliga och ... vi är väldigt snälla här... Och dom, det blir lite extra daltande med dom, än vad det blir för oss som är liksom militanta ateister.

[Allmänt skratt i gruppen]

Elev 1: Jag känner mig förtryckt!

Jag: Så om du är militant islamist, så daltar vi med dig, men om du är militant ateist, så, var det så du sa?

Elev1: Faktiskt lite! Ja, så upplever jag det iallafall

Jag: Jaha, okej. ... Alltså ser, på vilket sätt daltar man med muslimer på det sättet?

Elev 2: Jo men det är för att det, deras tro är viktigare än vad min anti-tro, eller vad man ska kalla ateism.

Jag: Tycker du att det är så i Sverige?

Elev 2: Ja det är så! Väldigt så. För att jag får liksom inte säga att dom, dom får säga att ja, du kommer att brinna i helvetet, men om jag säger att din Gud inte finns och du är dum i huvudet som tror på det! Ja då är jag en rasist som borde, ja, då är jag en dålig människa

⁶⁵ Cf. excerpt 85

Me: Okay... Are you a racist if you criticize someone's religion?

Jag: Okej... Är man rasist om man kritiserar någons religion?

Student 2: Yes, in Sweden today it is like that. But I see it as a necessity!

Elev 2: Ja, i dagens samhälle är det på så sätt. Men jag ser det som en nödvändighet!

Excerpt 17 (audio-file 9 November 2011).

In the dialogues it is shown that the students perceive religions in general, and Islam in particular as creating wars and conflicts, but also that it is taboo to express this opinion.⁶⁶ Criticism of Islam was in this context linked to racism which was something Student 2 in Excerpt 16 also said – that religious views were respected to a much greater extent than non-religious people's views. He expressed that his atheistic worldview did not receive the same respect and that the right of freedom of religion, to freely practice and express religious opinions, was respected much more than the right to avoid religious influence. This opinion was articulated in various discussions in the classrooms and reveals the conflict in the concept of freedom of religion (cf. Roth, 2012).

Critical thinking is emphasized as one of the most important abilities that education in both primary and secondary education should develop. The curricula of upper secondary school state that: "The students should be trained in critical thinking, to scrutinize facts and circumstances and to realize the consequences of different alternatives" (Skolverket, 2011b, p. 7, own translation). Non-confessional integrative RE in Sweden should, according to the syllabus of RE, entail discussions of constructive criticism of religion: "Teaching should give students the opportunity to analyse texts and concepts, critically examine sources, discuss and argue" (Skolverket, 2011a). During the participant observations the students had the opportunity to practice and develop these critical competencies. There were however also lessons where critically examining something was equated with criticizing it, as in condemning and disapproving. Simultaneously, students said that they were not allowed to articulate criticism of religion, especially concerning Islam. Criticism of Islam seemed to be governed by a different kind of logic than criticism of other religions. On the one hand, Islam was the religion that got the most criticism in the classroom and was associated with the most negative connotations.

⁶⁶ Across Europe and also in Sweden there is a debate in which right-wing populist parties struggle for greater influence. These groups argue that there is an ongoing Islamization of the West. Many of these claim that you cannot criticize Islam, which it is not "politically correct" to do this and that critical facts about Islam are silenced by mainstream society. See for ex Malm (2011).

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Paradoxically, on the other hand, it was repeatedly articulated in the classrooms that it is taboo to criticize Islam. This paradox can be seen as the backdrop for the rhetoric of right-wing parties where they cultivate a martyrdom in this area and see themselves as courageous truth-tellers (Malm, 2011).

Science and faith

In the RE-classroom practice the relation between science and faith, between knowledge and beliefs was the subject of discussion. Articulations here concern the role and function of science vs. religion.

Religion and faith were in many cases constructed as contradictory and science was linked to articulations of facts, reality and truth. During the observations there was not a single incidence of any student or teacher questioning evolution theory or other theories of science.⁶⁷ Articulations related to science and faith could be constructed through evolutionary, psychological and scientific explanations of religion's origins and religion's existence with reference to fear of death. For example, one teacher commented on a student's work in which she discusses why religion exists, from an evolutionary perspective:

Teacher: That was a really exciting image! And suddenly it strikes me that perhaps it is human vulnerability and loneliness that feeds the religious sentiment... Sometime long ago someone made up an imaginary friend because he was lonely... and so it was an evolutionary advantage for that person...

Lärare: Det var en riktigt spännande bild! Och plötsligt slår det mig att det kanske är människans utsatthet och ensamhet som föder det religiösa... någon gång hittade någon på en låtsaskompis för att det blev ensamt... och så var det en evolutionär fördel för den personen...

Excerpt 18 (Written comment on student work).

The teacher highlights the notion that being religious might have been an evolutionary advantage and articulates religious beliefs as "made up, imaginary friends". She uses a scientific language and interprets religion from an evolutionary theory approach. The relationship between religion and science is a subject that has occupied philosophers for many centuries and is central to a secularist discourse. It is also subject matter which is clearly stated in the

⁶⁷ Some other studies point in another direction. Sjögren (2011) found that teachers are afraid of conflict and in order not to offend anybody, present religious worldviews as equal to scientific worldviews and leave the questions for the students to decide.

syllabus of RE in Lgy11 (Skolverket, 2011a), but was addressed even in the classroom where the older syllabus of Lpf 94 (Skolverket, 2000a) was applied. It was articulated that science in many ways has replaced the role of religion:

Teacher: Science, is it the ultimate truth? Is it science that owns the truth? Can science be a means to get on the right side?

Student: Science can of course also be wrong. But it is more taboo to say it, [compared to] religion, if they say that something is true.

Teacher: That's interesting, that it should be taboo! There are many people who are provoked by the truth claims of religions.

Student: I do not know. It is perhaps because religions are more difficult to change. Science changes, but it's hard to change what was written 2000 years ago.

Lärare: Vetenskapen, är det den ultimata sanningen? Är det vetenskapen som har sanningen? Kan vetenskapen vara ett hjälpmedel för att komma på rätt sida?

Elev: Vetenskapen har ju också fel. Men det är mer tabubelagt att säga det, [jämfört med] med religion, om de säger att något är sant.

Lärare: Det var intressant, att det skulle vara tabu! Det är många som blir provocerade av religioners sanningsanspråk.

Elev: Jag vet inte. Det är kanske för att religioner är svårare att ändra på.

Vetenskapen ändrar sig, men det är svårt att förändra det som skrevs för 2000 år sedan.

Excerpt 19 (audio-file 11 October 2011).

In this dialogue the teacher and the student discussed truth claims of science and religion. To the teacher's surprise, the student argued that it is taboo to criticize science. Both the reference to the taboo of criticising scientific truths and the teacher's surprise of the comment can be seen as a sign of the supremacy of a scientific interpretation of the world. When asked about the truth claims of religions the student points to the inherent changeability of science, which he perceives that religions lack.

On the *Natural Science Programme* and *Technology Programme*, science and scientific methods have a central role in the teaching and the students are socialized into an identity as "scientists" [Swedish: *naturare*] and "technicians" [Swedish: *tekniker*] (cf. Beach, 1999; Hjelmér, 2012). A scientific worldview was constructed as opposed to a religious worldview. The teachers who taught on these programs expressed that this sometimes meant difficulties in teaching about religion, since these students, in line with the hegemony of science, were very critical of religion. These opinions some teachers tried to problematize and challenge by describing trust in science as a belief or a worldview. Articulations of differences between "faith" and "knowledge" were discussed and one teacher introduced the concepts of "objective truth" and "subjective truth":

Student 4: Like, there are religious people I guess who are aware that there is no proof and so forth, and that they understand that

Elev 4: Alltså, det finns väl religiösa folk som är medvetna om att det inte finns bevis och så, och att dom förstår att folk tror på Gud

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

people believe in God or something. It could be a sort of truth that they pray, they believe very much that God exists, for example. But they understand themselves that people can choose not to believe that, they want proof and so on.

Teacher: Yes

Student 4: Then it's a truth to them, but at the same time, they know that there is no evidence for it. So it is still a sort of truth, even if they don't actually have the evidence.

Teacher: But can there be two truths at the same time? A subjective view that is true for you as individuals, and a truth which perhaps is objective and that everyone can agree on? A tough question...

Student 1: I think so, absolutely. Like, or I can know something about myself, I can say that I see myself as maybe, very humble for example. It is a truth for me, but it may not be so for anyone else, for it is not what they have seen of me. Then it's like a truth for me, or like what Adam said, so I absolutely think there can be two different truths. And that's what I meant too when I spoke up before about the difference between believing and knowing, I think it goes together.

Teacher: I do not know if you've thought about it, but I suddenly had a thought - believe and know, and sometimes both have weight, both claim to have the Truth with a capital T. The scientist standing there with his white coat who says that "this is the truth of the relationship that elements have to one another", and so we have, like the believer who says "this is true", "we have proof for this". There can be a struggle between different epistemological theories and so it may be that that they have different claims on what is right and wrong. You will take the philosophy course later, then you will look into that. But if we think that faith is something that you hold to be true, and one can believe in scientific method, I say that is also a belief.

Excerpt 20 (audio-file 4 October 2011).

During these observations, I occasionally met this type of more exploratory discussions, which opened up for several alternative kinds of articulations. The teachers played many times the role of "devil's advocate" to challenge what was

eller så. Det kan ju vara en sån sanning att dom ber, dom tror på det stenhårt att Gud finns till exempel. Men att dom förstår själva att folk kan välja att inte tro på det, att dom vill ha bevis och så.

Lärare: Ja

Elev 4: Då är det ju en sanning för dom, men samtidigt så vet dom att det inte finns något bevis för det. Så det är ändå en sanning liksom, även om dom inte har det bevisat för sig.

Lärare: Men kan det finnas två sanningar samtidigt? En subjektiv som är sant för er som individer, och en sanning som kanske är objektiv och som alla kan vara överens om? En jobbig fråga...

Elev 1: Det tycker jag, absolut. Liksom, eller jag kan ju veta nånting om mig själv, jag kan ju säga att jag ser mig själv som kanske jätteödmjuk till exempel. Det är en sanning för mig, men att det inte är det för några andra, för det är inte det dom har sett av mig. Då är det ju en sanning för mig liksom, eller det som Adam sa liksom, så jag tror absolut det kan finnas två olika sanningar. Och det var det jag menade också när jag snackade förut med skillnaden mellan tro och veta, jag tycker det går ihop.

Lärare: Jag vet inte om ni har tänkt på det, men jag fick plötsligt en tanke - tro och veta, och ibland väger båda, båda gör anspråk på att ha då Sanningen med stort S. Forskaren som står där med sin vita rock som säger att "det här är sanningen om grundämnenas relation till varandra" och så har vi liksom den som tror som säger att "det här är sant", "det har vi bevis för". Det kan vara en kamp mellan olika kunskapssyner och så kan det vara så att man har olika anspråk på vad som är rätt och fel. Ni kommer att läsa filosofin, då kommer ni in på det. Men om vi tänker oss att tro är något som man håller för att vara sant, och man kan ju tro på vetenskaplig metod, det är också en tro säger jag.

taken for granted. In some classrooms the secularist discourse created one single unequivocal truth that wasn't problematized or explored but the articulations of both students and teachers were pronounced with an absolute certainty that did not invite or encourage further tentative conversations. In other classrooms, the teachers created a climate where more thoughts could be circulated simultaneously and different positions could hence be explored. Even in these classrooms the secularist discourse was vibrant, but did not become hegemonic as the teacher opened up for alternative positions - *how* a discussion was led also affected the content. One example of this was shown above in Excerpt 20, and another example of this kind of discussion was when the teacher introduced the topic of human free will and whether a human being has a soul from a biological and a religious worldview. The teacher brought in different articulations and the students reflected on the meaning of different ways of thinking.

Teacher: This priest situates the Christian view of man and puts it in contrast to a biological one and says that if we have no spiritual essence we are just biology, chemicals, and so, then we could not be really morally responsible for any actions. And free will here, would not exist. What do you say about this? Are we only matter, just chemicals and a set of genes?

Student 1: Yes perhaps we are.

Student 2: Morals, morality is also neurotransmitters in the brain. If you want to see it that way

Teacher: Well in such cases. But then we cannot be responsible for our actions?

Student 2: How do you mean?

Teacher: How can we be if we only are chemicals?

Student 3: A machine that does what you have programmed it to!

Student 1: Maybe that is not quite how I think it is...Or ...

Lärare: Den här prästen ställer den kristna människosynen och ställer den mot en biologisk och menar att har vi inget andligt väsen är vi bara biologi, kemikalier och så, då skulle vi inte kunna vara moraliskt ansvariga egentligen för några handlingar. Och den fria viljan här, skulle inte existera. Vad säger ni om detta? Är vi materia, bara kemikalier och genuppsättningar?

Elev 1: Ja det är ja vi kanske.

Elev 2: Moral, det moraliska är också signalsubstanser i hjärnan ju. Om man ska se det så.

Lärare: Ja i såna fall. Men då kan vi ju inte vara ansvariga för våra handlingar?

Elev 2: Hur menar du då?

Lärare: Hur kan man vara det om vi bara är kemikalier?

Elev 3: En maskin som gör det man har programmerat den till!

Elev 1: Så kanske inte jag tror att det är, riktigt. Eller...

Excerpt 21 (audio file 7 December 2011).

The teacher presented different positions and contradictions related to science and faith and possible consequences of different ways of thinking, and he opened up for the possibility of holding either a biological or a religious view of man or both simultaneously and different positions within those. In this context the discussions concerning religion and science became more nuanced. This was articulated in a context in which the students were expected to argue,

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

discuss, reason and think for themselves, and the students could express uncertainty. How the topic was introduced and problematized influenced how the students related to the topic.

In one of the observed classes the whole RE course, as previously mentioned (Excerpt 11), started with a lecture given by an invited researcher who introduced himself as “a neuroscientist from the University”. He gave a lecture that essentially touched on psychological research about perception. Among other things he spoke about the brain creating “false memories”:

External lecturer: We see and hear what we want to see. But we create false memories. Our brains make us believe that things have happened that have not happened. I have, for instance, a memory of lying under a grapevine, picking grapes and eating. Of course, I had diarrhoea afterwards. Three years ago I looked through a photo album of me as a child, and saw myself lying under the bush - I had created a false memory based on the image. And I had obviously heard my mother talking about it. It's not that hard to create false memories.

Extern föreläsare: Vi ser och hör det vi vill se. Men vi skapar falska minnen. Våra hjärnor får oss att tro att saker har hänt som inte hänt. Jag har t.ex. ett minne av att jag ligger under en vindruvsbuske och plockar vindruvor och äter. Självklart fick jag diarré efteråt. För tre år sedan tittade jag i ett fotoalbum på mig som liten, och såg mig liggandes under busken – jag hade skapat ett falskt minne utifrån den bilden. Och jag hade självklart hört mamma berätta. Det är inte så svårt att skapa sig falska minnen.

Excerpt 22 (audio-file 26 September 2011).

Teaching about this perspective on religion in the context of RE is important and relevant, both with respect to the wording in the syllabus and the general academic discussion within the field of religious studies. The perspectives and the worldview of the lecturer were, however, not made explicit to the students; nor were cognitive perspectives on religion discussed during this or the following lessons. As this was articulated in the context of RE, these articulations created the impression that religious people more or less pretend and invent their beliefs, which enhanced the obviousness of the scientific perspective.

Through articulations about science related and compared to different aspects of religion, a religious interpretation of the world was constructed as less valid in relation to a scientific worldview. To question the supremacy of science was not possible. Religions were understood in terms of functional and evolutionary explanations. This approach to religion and RE is in line with cognitive science, which tries to understand and explain religious beliefs and behaviours in terms of cognitive capacities and structures of mind. Religion is regarded as a mental product that originates in cognitive structures in the brain and is a consequence

of the evolutionary process. The reason that people believe in Gods or other supernatural entities is that the brain is predisposed to imagine hidden causal forces in nature, which is then attributed to the capacity to act independently (cf. Boyer, 2001; Brelsford, 2005). In the classrooms there were never any explicit references to this kind of research.

Individualism

Individualism was held high in the classrooms and had positive connotations in articulations of autonomy of the individual and making one's own choices. Religion and being religious was problematic to reconcile with individualism, as religion was associated with submitting to collective rules and following doctrines.

My own choice

Individualism was often articulated and positioned as incompatible with being part of a collective community, for example a religion. Articulations of individualism and autonomy of the individual were tied to a secularist discourse. Religion was strongly associated with coercion and following rules. When encountering religious people individual agency was often the focus of interest. One student had, as part of his RE class, met a Catholic monk, and he told the class about the question he posed:

Student: Like the Catholic monk, I tried to ask: how do you see right and wrong, and then he said - the Church's view is like this and like this and like this. When he had stood there talking for five minutes, I tried again, Yes but how do YOU perceive right and wrong, and then he said, well like the church. My conclusion was that this person doesn't think much for himself, and not very independently either, and then yes ... that was the conclusion I came to.

Elev: Som den katolska munken försökte jag fråga; hur ser du på rätt och fel, och då sa han - kyrkans syn är så här och så här och så här. När han stått och pratat i fem minuter så försökte jag igen, jamen hur ser DU på rätt och fel, och då sa han, ja som kyrkan. Min slutsats blev att den här personen inte tänker så mycket själv, och inte särskilt originellt heller, och då ja... det var den slutsatsen jag drog.

Excerpt 23 (audio file 6 October 2011).

In other words, religious people do not themselves choose what to do or think.⁶⁸ They must submit to the rules for how to dress, what to eat, how to celebrate the holidays, they must pray at special times, in special places and follow religious leaders' statements about what is right and wrong in all sorts of contexts. Doing anything with reference to religion or God (who could be

⁶⁸ See also excerpt 8.

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

articulated as fictional, see excerpt 15 and 18) was impossible if you wanted to be seen as a modern, strong, independent individualistic Swede. One sign that individualism was a dominant ideal was that even students who have a faith stated that they choose their faith and that they choose selectively and independently what they embrace of the religious tradition that they still see themselves as part of:

Student 2: Yeah, but things that religions say that you should follow. Because you belong to this

Student 1: Just because it is so

Student 2: Yes because you belong to this religion. But I don't feel like that. Sure, I am a Muslim, but I don't do ... [*what*] people say, what THEY want me to believe in

Student 1: You decide!

Student 2: Yeah right!

Elev 2: Ja, men saker som religioner säger att det ska du följa. För du tillhör den här

Elev 1: Bara för att det är så

Elev 2: Ja för att du tillhör den här religionen. Men så känner inte jag. Visst, jag är muslim, men jag gör inte det... folket säger, det DOM vill att jag ska tro på

Elev 1: Du väljer själv!

Elev 2: Ja precis!

Excerpt 24 (audio-file 2 April 2012).

These students articulated the importance of making individual choices in relation to religion. Based on the observations of RE, individualism seems to be an absolute value in a world where pluralism and relativism otherwise were articulated ideals. The articulations emphasising individual choice and agency can also be seen in relation to the academic discussions of the implications and consequences of modernity, individualism and secularity, sometimes referred to as the "subjective turn", i.e. the emphasis of emotions and wellbeing rather than duties and obligations (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). This, of course, has implications for how religiosity is understood and articulated. As in the above excerpt, "the subjective turn" entails that it is the choice of the individual that creates religion and tradition, not tradition and religiosity that creates the faith of the individual.

Religion, especially Islam, was associated with submitting to (irrational) rules and Islam was that religious tradition that was articulated as most difficult to reconcile with individualism. In the excerpt below, fasting during Ramadan was discussed:

Student 5: So if you do not fast, do you donate money to the mosque instead then?

Student 6: It's not an obligation! But you do that, you know, out of free will, just so.

Elev 5: Så om man inte fastar, skänker man pengar till moskén istället då?

Elev 6: Det är inte ett måste! Men man gör det, du vet, av egen vilja, bara så.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY PLURALISTIC SWEDEN

Student 1: Even if you're 30 years old, so you do not have fast, then, it is up to you.

Teacher: But there are so many Muslims who do fast.

Student 1: Yes, yes of course, if you are religious, then you should do it. That is so.

Teacher: But it's not the case that if you are Muslim and don't fast that something happens. It is as you say still voluntary.

Student 1: Exactly!

Student 3: It is voluntary to go to the mosque, it is voluntary to

Student 4: PRAY! Fasting and all that is voluntary.

Teacher: It is one of the foundations

Student 1: You choose what you want to do!

Excerpt 25 (audio-file 18 February 2012).

Elev 1: Även om du är 30 år, så behöver du inte fasta, alltså, det är upp till dig själv

Lärare: Men det är väldigt många muslimer som fastar.

Elev 1: Ja ja det är klart, är du troende så ska du ju göra det. Det är ju så.

Lärare: Men det är inte så att om man inte fastar, och är muslim att det händer nåt.

Det är ju som ni säger ändå frivilligt.

Elev 1: Exakt!

Elev 3: Det är frivilligt att gå till moskén, det är frivilligt att

Elev 4: BE! Fasta och allt sånt är frivilligt

Lärare: Det är ett av fundamenten.

Elev 1: Du får välja vad du vill göra!

Student 5 was asking her Muslim classmates about what they are compelled to do as Muslims. The students that positioned themselves as Muslims emphasized the voluntary nature of their religion. These students eagerly emphasized the voluntary nature both regarding religious practices and beliefs. They performed some religious practices, but not out of tradition or oppression – fasting was a result of their own conscious, voluntary choice, not something that they unquestioningly only submitted to or were forced to do.

One aspect of individualism, which is also visible in the excerpts above, was that there was no higher authority than the individual, and this was articulated in different ways in relation to a discussion of what might be described as sacred or holy and if so, why. Holiness was a concept that the students seemed to have difficulty relating to: it had no concrete meaning to most students. Phenomena that were nevertheless articulated as being sacred were, for instance, their own private family relations, which had no (traditional) religious connection. If something were to be considered holy, this was not due to any religion – it was up to each individual to decide if something was to be regarded as sacred or not:

Student: Just because religion says what is sacred it is not necessarily sacred to me. I don't respect objects or places for their own sake, but [*I respect*] the people who think that those places are sacred.

Elev: Bara för att religionen säger vad som är heligt behöver det inte vara heligt för mig. Jag respekterar inte objekten eller platserna för dess egen skull, men [*jag respekterar*] människorna som tycker att de platserna är heliga.

Excerpt 26 (audio-file 11 October 2011).

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Put differently, there was no authority outside the individual – every individual must take a stand and create his or her own personal version of religion (cf. Heelas & Woodhead, 2005).⁶⁹

Individualism and the rights of children

The importance of making one’s own choices was also articulated in relation to children in religious movements, which was a subject that aroused much emotion. The students maintained that parents should not be allowed to bring their children into religious movements.⁷⁰ They argued that children cannot defend themselves and cannot make their own choices and concluded: “I feel sorry for the kids”. These articulations resolved a general view concerning children of religious people in general - children should not be forced to go to churches, mosques or temples or be subjected to “religious influence” in the form of religious stories or participation in various forms of religious children’s activities. The students articulated that children couldn’t make a conscious choice of their own if they were heavily influenced by religion at an early age. In one class during a discussion of children in the Hare Krishna Movement (ISCON), the teacher tried to highlight and problematize this secularist position by saying:

Teacher: [*is ironic*] I understand that your parents withhold from you their jobs and businesses and their personal life and friends and hobbies, in that you are not involved at all right?

Student 1: That I think I have to protest against.

Teacher: You do?

Student 1: My mom and I share both work and hobbies, I am with my mom every day. And her job, I know just about EVERYTHING, we’re talking about that precisely the whole time.

Teacher: Then you have to be incredibly influenced by your parents?

Student 1: Yes

Lärare: [*är ironisk*] Jag förstår att era föräldrar undanhåller er från sina jobb och företag och sina privatliv och vänner och fritidsintressen, där är inte ni med nånstans va?

Elev 1: Det får jag nog protestera mot.

Lärare: Det får du?

Elev 1: Jag och mamma delar både jobb och fritidsintresse, jag är med min mamma varje dag. Och hennes jobb vet jag precis ALLT om, det pratar vi om exakt hela tiden

Lärare: Då måste ju du vara en oerhört påverkad person av dina föräldrar?

Elev 1: Ja

Lärare: Är det negativt då eller positivt eller fanns det något val där?

⁶⁹ Having said this, it must be noted that individualism in the sense of making a personal decision is not only reserved to modern contemporary people. The Lutheran Reformation, the eighteenth-century pietism and nineteenth-century revival movements are all examples of movements that emphasized the repentance of the individual and the importance of a personal faith.

⁷⁰ Cf. similar articulations in excerpt 8.

Teacher: Is it negative or positive, or was there any choice there?

Student 1: I know for certain that I do not intend to work with the same job as she does ... And we have our own company, and of course I am also, I know all about the bookkeeping there and how it works and so, they don't directly withhold anything.

Teacher: But should they not do that so you could develop into a full-fledged person Elinor? So you did not have to work in the business and horses and everything. You might be able to get involved in... Formula One or something instead?

Student 1: Yes....

Teacher: Do you understand what I am getting at? It is difficult if you are living together as a family to withhold your values from your children, what you yourself believe in and what you yourself are living in the midst of whether it is about faith or companies or jobs or money or whatever it is about ... we all live in this in some way, we will of course be influenced by our parents in some respects, it's like that for everyone. And the question is whether it is more right or wrong? They're in a community?

Student 2: But I feel that religion is a little bit worse

Teacher: It's worse? Could this be related to the fact that we are so secularized?

Excerpt 27 (audio file 7 December 2011).

Elev 1: Jag vet ju att jag absolut inte tänker jobba med samma jobb som hon gör... Och vi har egen firma, och den är jag ju också, jag vet vad det är för ekonomi där och liksom hur det går till och så, dom undanhåller inte direkt.

Lärare: Men borde dom inte göra det då så att du fick utvecklas till en helt egen person Elinor? Så att du inte behövde hålla på med firma och hästar och allt. Du kanske skulle kunna hålla på med... Formel 1 eller nånting istället?

Elev 1: Ja...

Lärare: Förstår ni vart jag vill komma? Det är svårt om man lever ihop som en familj att undanhålla barnen från ens värderingar, det man själv tror på och det som man själv lever mitt i antingen det handlar om tro eller företag eller jobb eller pengar eller vad det än handlar om... vi alla lever ju i det här på nåt sätt, vi blir ju påverkade av våra föräldrar i nåt avseende, så är det för alla. Och frågan är om det är mer rätt eller fel? Dom är ju med i gemenskap?

Elev 2: Men det känns som att religion är lite värre

Lärare: Det är värre? Kan det ha med att göra att vi är så sekulariserade?

Religion was articulated as “a little bit worse”, or as having a stronger impact than other things. However in this specific context, the students’ secular taken-for-granted positions was made explicit and challenged by the teacher.

The highest authority

The individual was seen as the highest authority. Many students found religiously motivated acts to be strange and it was hard to understand, for example, why religious people asked God for forgiveness. It was perceived as much more important to ask the offended person for forgiveness. To find yourself, believe in yourself and create your own personal philosophy of life was articulated as central:

Student: I just wanted to add one thing there. This thing about just believing in yourself. I

Elev: Jag ville bara lägga till en sak där. Men det här med att bara tro på sig själv. Jag tror

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

think it's harder to do that than to believe, then, than to have a belief in some God or something. I think it's harder to really find yourself and believe, know what you believe in when it comes to yourself, within yourself. So I think it's a little because of this that there is religion, because it's a little bit easier. Than to believe in yourself.

att det är svårare att göra det, än att tro på, alltså, än att ha någon tro på nån Gud eller så. Jag tror att det är svårare att verkligen hitta sig själv och tro, vet vad man tror på när det gäller sig själv, alltså inom sig. Så jag tror att det är lite därför man har en religion också, för att det är lite lättare nästan. Än att tro på sig själv.

Excerpt 28 (audio-file 11 October 2011).

This excerpt shows how in the classroom discourse a belief in God was replaced by a belief in humankind; theology was replaced with anthropology. In line with this, individualism appears natural clearly, and it is articulated as more "difficult" to choose a personal way than to "believe in some God or something". This reasoning was an explanation as to why people in the world surrender and choose to believe in religions to such a large extent – human weakness. However, strong individuals choose their own way. Religion was also associated with submitting to a whole tradition and following the interpretations of religious leaders.

There was a strong aversion to conforming to a fixed box: "buy a whole concept of religion".⁷¹ Identity construction is all about the individual's own choices, and choosing doesn't mean unreflective subordination. During the observations I noticed that students did not seem to identify with the society they lived in. They did not think of themselves as part of the society. What mattered to them were their own family and their closest relationships; relations were something that many students characterized as "sacred" (cf. Day, 2011).

In classroom discussions it was highlighted that the most common form of religiosity in Sweden is private religiosity, which was articulated as individuals independently incorporating elements from different traditions and religions:

Teacher: It is often said that the most common form of religiosity in Sweden, is what we usually describe as PRIVATE RELIGIOSITY. So I have taken a box and then I have taken a bit from there, and a bit from there and a little from there and some stuff like that. And so I blended my own

Lärare: Man brukar säga att den vanligaste formen av religiositet i Sverige är det som brukar beskrivas som PRIVATRELIGIOSITET. Alltså att jag har tagit en låda och så har jag tagit lite därifrån, och lite därifrån och lite därifrån och lite sånt. Och så har jag mixat min egen religion som

⁷¹ This antipathy to identifying with collectives applies not only to religious movements - in recent decades political parties in Sweden have had decreasing numbers of members in favour of single issue movements or shorter engagement on specific issues which is made possible due to the development of social media. For an analysis of the decrease in members in political parties see, for example, Karlsson and Lundberg (2011).

<p>religion that does not look like anyone else's, but of course can resemble, if we imagine, because it is obvious that most of us have something Christian in here as we still live in a country that previously was Christian</p>	<p>inte ser ut som någon annans, men givetvis kan likna, om vi tänker oss, för självklart är det så att dom flesta av oss har nåt kristet här i för att vi ändå lever i ett land som tidigare var kristet</p>
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Excerpt 29 (audio-file 3 October 2011).

Depending on which definition of secularity that is applied, the above excerpt can be seen as part of the secularist discourse. Religion is attributed to the private sphere and is seen as an individual project.

Individualism was articulated as a central value in the classroom practice. In surveys and research describing perceptions of Swedes, individualism is a value held high and greatly appreciated (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2006). Swedes like to think of themselves as highly individualistic and this was apparent in the discourse of the classrooms. These articulations of individualism can be seen as an example of how the “subjective turn” and sacralisation of the individual was constructed in relation to religion within RE. The obsession with analysing how and what one feels can be seen as one of the hallmarks of modernity (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). The self, how *I* feel, what *I* believe is at the centre. People in the contemporary world need to feel that this is right for *me*, that I can embrace my own beliefs, not because I am supposed to embrace them because of being part of a certain tradition or institution. This ethos stems from an ideal of authenticity rooted in Romanticism where a core value is that modern individuals develop their true selves, their own unique personality, what has been called the crucial importance of “becoming myself” (Risenfors, 2011; Sigurdson, 2009). This “subjective turn” affected discourses of religion, since religion and individualism in some respects were articulated as incompatible. Religion in general, but especially Islam was associated with submitting to collective rules. This association is not unique to the RE classroom. Hjärpe (2012) concludes that the idea that religious affiliation is determining for human behaviour; the notions that religions are static and unchangeable and that religious people blindly obey religious leaders are commonly found in Swedish political debates, but empirically proven incorrect. However, traces of such reasoning were evident in the RE-classroom. Buddhism was the religious tradition with the most positive connotations, and the motives for this representation were mainly related to individualism. Buddhism was portrayed

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

as a worldview with no judging God where the individual has the freedom to follow rules or not.

Modern myths

In the classrooms it was frequently articulated that religions previously gave answers to existential questions; now other things provide meaning. Discussions revolved around questions and ideas that help people to find their way in life today as well as narratives that guide people in contemporary society.

In order to make the content of RE relevant for the students, the teachers many times tried to compare the religious content to similar non-religious features that they assumed would be closer to the students' experiences. One example of this pedagogical approach is the excerpt below, which originates in a lesson where religious myths were discussed. The teacher did make an effort to get the students to bring themselves and their contemporary world in relation to the concept of myth, but the students were stuck in their way of thinking about religions, and also tended to interpret the term “myth” as equivalent to a lie or something false.⁷² In different wordings both teacher and students stated that “We are not governed by religious myths today”. But the teacher was trying to clarify what he meant and asked what “grand narratives” or modern myths students as Western youth believe in today (cf. Lyotard, 1984). Eventually, the teacher gave his own version of some of the myths that govern contemporary Sweden:

Teacher: I would argue that there are lots of myths about happiness, what creates happiness in a person's life. For example, about money – If I have a lot of money I will be happy. Or if I have this body index, I will be happy. Beauty, health... status, gadgetry, that kind of stuff creates happiness. I think there are a lot of myths in our society. If I shop, I become happy, that kind of myth that we, on the one hand know is not true, but on the other hand, we follow this, we do certain things.

Lärare: Jag vill hävda att det finns mängder av myter om lycka, vad som skapar lycka i en människas liv. Till exempel det här med pengar – har jag mycket pengar så blir jag lycklig. Eller har jag det här kroppsindexet, så blir jag lycklig. Skönhet, hälsa... status, prylar, den typen av grejer skapar lycka. Det tror jag det finns mycket myter om i vårt samhälle. Om jag shoppar blir jag lycklig, den typen av myter som vi å ena sidan vet är inte sant, men å andra sidan så följer ju den, vi följer vissa saker.

Excerpt 30 (audio-file 27 September 2011).

⁷² The Swedish word [*myt*] has this double meaning and can be translated both as a grand narrative often used in relation to religions and worldviews, but also as a lie, a false narrative.

Happiness, fulfilment, beauty, health, mainly through consumption were values that the teacher articulated as having replaced the religious conceptions of what gives meaning and satisfaction. In this excerpt, the teacher states that “we know it is not true” that consumerism and materialism can provide happiness, but we live as if believe that. In this sense this is an example of a secular interpretation of life. The teacher below is using the same line of reasoning as the one in the quote above:

Teacher: I feel that there is a grand narrative about beauty in our culture. It is the narrative of how we should look. And it is dictated to us and related by advertisers, of those who want to sell stuff and products to us, make-up companies, and the music industry... that is for me a grand narrative that is told in our culture today.

Lärare: Jag känner att en stor berättelse om skönhet finns i vårt samhälle. Det är berättelsen om hur vi ska se ut. Och den dikteras och berättas av reklamare, av de som vill sälja prylar och produkter till oss, av sminkföretagen, av musikbranschen... det är för mig en stor berättelse som berättas i vårt samhälle idag

Excerpt 31 (audio-file 29 September 2011)

Many of the teachers tried to relate their teaching to pupils' own experiences, and “translate” and relate concepts such as faith, holiness, and myth to the experience of the students. The connection between similar aspects within religions and non-religious worldviews were however not made explicit, but the focus in the observed lessons was how the students related to these concepts. That health, happiness and materialism is central in “our” culture was frequently stated during many RE-lessons in different classes, and as in the above presented excerpts, teachers (not mentioning the name of Lyotard (1984)) concluded that these new non-religious narratives have replaced the religious grand narratives.

It was thus determined that the religious myths were superseded by other non-religious myths. All myths contain utopian notions of a good life, a good society, etc. According to the perspective of discourse theory, myths can be understood as part of the creation and the maintenance of hegemony. For a myth to arise it requires a shift in the discourse and the function of the myth is to “nail down” this shift and create a new space for the elements of the discourse. The myth can be seen as fundamentally hegemonic because it contains norms, values and assumptions, and thus helps to create a new objectivity (Laclau, 1990). In the classrooms there was no discussion or open disagreement about the myths that the teachers articulated as hegemonic in contemporary Sweden, but the

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

reference to the myths of today was articulated with a critical edge, thus indicating that the myths of materialism and consumerism are somewhat false myths.

“Man is the measure of all things”

According to the syllabus, a compulsory content in RE is ethics.⁷³ The ethics part of RE in the classrooms can be seen as part of a secularist discourse as questions about what was considered right or wrong had no references to anything other than the individual's own perception or shared views in society. Democracy, equality and human dignity were articulated as absolute moral values.

You decide

The reason that something was considered right or good was because we think so, because humans have decided upon it. In the following excerpt it is shown how articulations concerning ethical matters were constructed with the human being as the ultimate judge:

Teacher: But at any rate today there is plenty of free space for the individual to decide for him- or herself. And it hasn't always been so. It used to be a criminal offense in Sweden not to go to church on Sundays, it's not so now. There were harsh penalties for sexual relations outside of marriage. It's not so today. It was like clear what one could and could not do before. Someone told us, the

Lärare: Men idag finns det i alla fall ett väldigt stort friutrymme för individen att bestämma själv. Och det har inte alltid varit så. Förr var det i Sverige straffbart att inte gå i kyrkan på söndagarna, så är det inte nu. Det var hårda straff för sexuella förbindelser utanför äktenskapet. Så är det ju inte heller idag. Det var liksom tydligare vad man fick och inte fick göra förr. Det var någon som talade om för

⁷³ The most common way to work on this part was through dilemma stories where different values were contrasted and aimed at making the students become aware of diverse ways of thinking and reasoning. Several of the classes also wrote essays in which they explored themes, such as: the death penalty, euthanasia, genetic engineering of crops or genetic manipulation of human embryos, stem cell research, abortion, arms exports, etc. One of the classes conducted a debate on ethically controversial questions where the students were to represent different religious and non-religious worldviews: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Existentialism, Marxism and Feminism. These were randomly assigned by the teacher, and the task was to engage in a role-play and debate ethical dilemmas from different perspectives. In most classes concepts such as ethical altruism, group-centred ethics, instrumental and intrinsic values were introduced as well as various ethical models as tools to determine if something is right or wrong: duty-ethics [Swedish: *pliketik*], consequence-ethics [Swedish: *konsekvensetik*] (utilitarian positions mentioned specifically as an example of a consequence-ethical position) and mind-ethics [Swedish: *sinnelagsetik*]. In the new syllabus virtue-ethics [Swedish: *dygdetik*] is mentioned, but the teachers in this study were not aware of this concept and didn't mention it, not even those who taught according to the new syllabus.

law said, the priest said, the teacher said, it was like this, do this, do this, do not do this. Today, when there's not so much control anymore a great deal more responsibility is placed on the individual. We have to think, what do we want to govern our lives, really? Based on what, do I want it to be by chance every time, or a gut feeling, or what do I want to be governing me anyway? What determines me, is it my mood that will decide?

Student 1: No

Teacher: No?

Student 1: It varies.

Teacher: It varies, yes. And what do you think should determine how we act? This is why it's important to reflect upon this, and this is what we will be working on now. We will be thinking a lot. One can say that ethics is about making decisions about how you want to live your life. It's a matter of learning to think independently. To dare to resist, to find a personal conviction concerning right and wrong, learn to resist peer pressure and bad leaders and stuff like that. It is important to say that ethics distinguishes between what is, what a person BELIEVES is right and what IS right. That Nazism once thought it was right, that their views were good and that slavery was okay, and things like that. Because something was considered right one time it doesn't mean that it IS right, just because you believe so. But you are on your own when it comes to moral issues. So you have to give it some thought.

Excerpt 32 (audio-file 10 November 2011).

It is thus up to the individual to decide what is right and wrong, but at the same time this teacher articulated that there *is* something absolutely right or wrong. However nowadays one has to rely on personal judgments and opinions to determine. It was mentioned in the classrooms, that within religions there are beliefs about right and wrong, but because there are so many different religions and interpretations one must decide for oneself. In these discussions, we see examples of what Taylor (2007) argues is the main cause of secularity – that pluralism and diversity of choices leads to secularization.

oss, lagen sa, prästen sa, läraren sa, det var så här, gör så här, gör så här, gör inte så här. Idag när det inte är så kontrollerat längre så läggs det ett mycket större ansvar på den egna individen. Det gäller för oss att tänka efter, vad vill vi ska styra våra liv egentligen? Utifrån [vad] vill vi, vill jag att det bara ska vara slumpen varje gång, eller känslan i magen, eller vad vill jag ska styra egentligen? Vad avgör att jag, är det humöret som ska avgöra?

Elev 1: Nej

Lärare: Nej?

Elev 1: Det är varierande

Lärare: Det är varierande ja. Och vad vill man ska avgöra? Därför är det viktigt att tänka efter och det är det vi ska jobba lite med nu. Vi ska tänka efter en del. Man kan säga att etiken går ut på att bestämma sig för hur man vill leva sitt liv. Det är en fråga om att lära sig tänka självständigt. Att våga stå emot, att hitta en personlig övertygelse om vad som är rätt och fel, lära sig stå emot gruppträck och dåliga ledare och sånt. Det är viktigt att säga att inom etiken skiljer man på vad som, vad en människa ANSER är rätt och vad som ÄR rätt. Att nazismen en gång ansåg att det var rätt att, att deras åsikter var goda och att slavhandel var okej och så där. För att man tyckte det var rätt en tid innebär inte det att det ÄR rätt, bara för att man anser det. Men man är hänvisad till sig själv när det gäller moralfrågor. Så det gäller att fundera lite

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Questions of right and wrong was related to the function of religion in different contexts. In the past God decided on right and wrong, now you have to decide yourself:

Teacher: Mmm... Humankind's eternal question, what is right and what is good? How to get religion into this? What have religions to do with questions about right and good?

Student 1: I thought, Christianity, the Ten Commandments, that you should follow them, that you should not kill, and...

Teacher: That's right, in that respect God has already decided that this is right and this is wrong. Then you do not need to think about it anymore, all you have to do is smile and follow orders.

Student 1: I'm thinking of karma. If you do something good then something good will happen, you like get it in return? It's somewhat like a rule, one can say

Teacher: It sure is.

Student 1: To follow that.

Teacher: Yes

Student 2: I think, therefore, personally, that ethics is something that is about what we conceive ourselves, and one's own ethics. You can't follow someone else's, but rather find your own.

Teacher: Yes. A little bit difficult?

Student 2: You should understand human behaviour, but I don't think we should follow what someone else says about how to behave.

Teacher: Isn't it hard to figure out, now I'll think of what I think is the right thing to say and do and act? Now I myself will define: Is this wrong or right? It's incredibly ambitious, but can you manage do this, do you think?

Student 2: Yes

[*The teacher laughs, surprised.*]

Excerpt 33 (audio-file 8 October 2011)

Again here we see an example of humankind as the measure of all things. In the excerpt, the link between religion and ethics was touched upon, and the view that there are beliefs about what is right and wrong within religions was expressed. When teachers and students discuss what they believe, the individual

Lärare: Mmm... Människans evig fråga, vad är det rätta och vad är det goda? Hur kan man få in religion i detta? Vad har religioner att göra med frågor om det rätta och det goda?

Elev 1: Jag tänkte, kristendomen, dom tio budorden, att man ska följa dom, att man inte ska dräpa och...

Lärare: Just det, där har ju Gud redan bestämt att det där är rätt och det där är fel. Då behöver du inte tänka på saken längre, utan, där har du det, det är bara att följa det och se glad ut.

Elev 1: Jag tänker på det där med karma. Gör du nånting bra så kommer nånting bra att hända, alltså du får tillbaka det liksom? Det är också lite en regel kan man säga

Lärare: Visst är det det

Elev 1: Att följa så.

Lärare: Ja

Elev 2: Jag tycker, alltså personligen, att etik är nånting som handlar om, det vi tänker ut själva, ens egna etik. Man ska inte följa nån annans, utan hitta sin egen

Lärare: Ja. Lite svårt?

Elev 2: Man ska förstå det det mänskliga beteendet, men jag tycker inte man ska följa vad nån annan säger hur man ska bete sig.

Lärare: Är det inte svårt att tänka ut, nu ska jag tänka ut vad jag själv tycker är det rätta att säga och göra och agera. Nu ska jag själv definiera: Är det här fel eller rätt? Det är oerhört ambitiöst, men fixar du det tror du?

Elev 2: Ja

[*Läraren skrattar förvånat*]

is at the centre. The image of the religious person as a mere non-thinking follower was reinforced as the teacher says that within religion God has already decided and you do not have to “think about it anymore, all you have to do is smile and follow orders”. Student 2 in the excerpt stresses her individual agency as she argues for the importance of individual choices.

In the contemporary Swedish classrooms of this study there were hardly any direct references to the Bible, with two exceptions: the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule.⁷⁴ When these were taken up it was also mentioned that these interpersonal rules (with the exception of the first three commandments dealing with obligations to God) are to be found in all religions:

Teacher: Another example is what is called the Golden Rule, which can be linked to this. The Golden Rule is actually something that exists in ALL religions. And you've definitely heard the Christian version of it. Is there anyone who could say what it is?

Student 1: Act toward others the way you yourself want to be treated.

Teacher: Yes. All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, you shall also do unto them. It is the Christian version. We'll see how it is worded in other religions ... [accesses it on the computer]. Yes, everyone writes a little differently, but this Golden Rule exists in all of them.

The teacher displays a list of formulations that are articulated as the Golden Rule in Baha'i, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Confucianism, Christianity, Sikhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism.

Lärare: Ett annat exempel är det man kallar den gyllenen regeln, som man kan koppla till detta. Den gyllene regeln är faktiskt något som finns i SAMTLIGA religioner. Och ni har definitivt hört den kristna varianten på den. Någon som skulle kunna säga vad den är?
Elev 1: Gör mot andra som du själv vill bli behandlad.

Lärare: Yes. Allt vad ni vill att människorna ska göra mot er ska ni också göra mot dem. Det är den kristna varianten. Vi ska se hur den är formulerad i andra religioner ... [tar fram den på datorn]. Ja, alla skriver lite olika, men den här gyllene regeln finns i alla.

Läraren visar en lista med formuleringar som artikuleras som den gyllenen regeln i Bahai, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judendom, Konfucianism, Kristendom, Sikhism, Hinduism, Taoism och Zoroastrism.

Excerpt 34 (audio-file 16 November 2011)

The Golden Rule was thus referred to as a global social rule and an ethical rule, easy to embrace regardless of religious or non-religious affiliation.

⁷⁴ In a comparison of discussions of ethics performed during video-recorded RE lessons between 1967-1968 during the so-called *Didaktisk Process-Analys, DPA-project* (Kittelman Flensner & Larsson, 2014) the Bible and Christianity were constituted as the obvious ethical compass and point of reference for what was perceived as right or wrong.

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Central values

When students were asked what they saw as important moral rules some themes were brought up with some variation: the importance of showing respect for others, to be tolerant, not to lie, not to steal or kill. But this was perceived right because humans think so, not because some God has said that these are the rules to follow, or because they are found in some religious text.

Values articulated as absolute moral values were democracy, human dignity and equality. Human dignity was seen as an absolute value with references to ancient times, natural law, but above all the UN Declaration of Human Rights. One of the teachers pointed out that the human dignity of believers is an intrinsic value because they perceived human beings as formed in the image of God, but that we now assume just the UN Declaration of Human Rights as the basis for our view of human dignity. Regarding the contrary, absolute evil, Hitler and the Nazi crimes during the Holocaust were frequently and in different contexts articulated as the one reference point of evil. The genocide in Rwanda and Breivik's mass murder of Utöja were other examples of articulations of evil, but these were compared and problematized in light of the Holocaust.

Some of the teachers tried in the context of the ethics section to discuss the responsibility of every human being towards other human beings. This was, for example, done through articles about some children harassed by Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and an article about beggars who have become a common feature in the streets of Sweden in recent years and evoke a lot of feelings. What is my responsibility with regard to these matters? What is evil? Is indifference to others' suffering a form of evil? Have all human beings the same value? Why? After a long discussion about human rights and the equality of all human beings, where the teacher had tried to get the students to give motives as to why they considered humans unique among living creatures, the teachers concluded:

Teacher. You won't ever find any proof that human beings are unique and special. You won't find a special equation that says yes, THAT'S why humanity has a special value. On the contrary, it is a kind of conviction or valuation that one can argue more or less wisely in favour of.

Lärare: Några bevis för att människan är unik och speciell kommer ni aldrig att kunna hitta. Ni kommer inte att hitta någon speciell ekvation som säger ja just det, det är DÄRFÖR människan har ett värde. Utan det är en slags övertygelse eller värdering som man kan argumentera mer eller mindre klokt för.

Excerpt 35 (audio-file 18 October 2011).

During the lessons issues relating to “meaning of life” were discussed from a personal life-question approach – what’s important in your life? In several classes, students were asked to rank values and to describe what was important and unimportant in their lives. One example is from a class that did this exercise as part of the RE-course’s ethics section:

Health	Beauty	Sex	Power
Financial security	Career and success	Be remembered by later generations	Intellectual stimulation
Security	Peace and quiet	Receive love	Be outdoors in nature
Family	Property	Partner	Children
Job satisfaction	Estimate	Humour and joy	Give love
Have a good relationship with God	Fellowship	Adaptability	Excitement, challenge, adventure
A life in luxury	Being good at something	Being together with family	Friendship

Excerpt 36 (distributed to the students 17 November 2011).

In the discussions related to the task, values related to one’s personal life were central to the students’ reasoning. The students were to pick out ten things and rank them. Most of the things chosen were things like health, family, security, and economic security. A majority of both male and female students emphasized family as the most important, including relationships with friends and love. Children were something everyone wanted. Financial security was held high by several. One female student thought a career was important. She said that her parents work a lot, and had been raised to believe that it is important to have a good job. The male students who were in the same group did not share that view, not that career was more important than relationships. A “good relationship with God” was one suggested option, and most argued that it was totally unimportant since they themselves stated that they did not believe in God. In the follow-up discussion, the teacher brought up the concept of intrinsic values and utilitarian values or instrumental values.

Ethics constitute a central part of RE and many of the teachers used tasks that encouraged the students to elaborate upon how they perceived different values. Family and close relationships were articulated as essential and important. On

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

the one hand, this can be understood as part of a secularist discourse in which, in the wording of the Greek sophist Protagoras, “man is the measure of all things”. Conversely, this can also be seen as an example of sacralisation of the self and human relations, which can be understood as a consequence of modernity. From Max Weber’s point of view, modernity is perceived as the take-over of science and rationality as the sole provider of truth, which consequently will result in the problematization of meaning. The lack or difficulty in experiencing meaning, is answered by “trying to be true to oneself”, “trying to listen to your real feelings” and “following your heart”. “With external reality having lost much of its former capacity to endow life with meaning, the deeper emotional layers of the self are left as the straw to clutch at in seeking solace for these problems” (Aupers & Houtman, 2010, p. 11). In the excerpts in this section, relations were articulated as the most important meaning-benefactor.

Religion as a private matter

A central aspect of a secularist discourse is that religion ought to be private, and public space should, according to this logic, be kept free from religion. Schools and classrooms can be viewed as public spaces, but during RE the students are expected to get involved in discussions about religion. In the classrooms there was an unwillingness to talk about personal religious perceptions. Religion was also considered to be a private matter, and this was shown through articulations of ambivalence towards religion in the public sphere.

Religion is private – what is not articulated

A discourse-analytical assumption is that a hegemonic discourse controls what is said, how it is said, but also what is not said. If a secularist discourse is hegemonic, religion becomes a very private matter, which makes people reluctant to talk about this matter in “public”. A sign of this is that the concept of religion was referred to in general, quite detached terms: “religious people”, “believers”, “we in Sweden”, “Christians”, “Muslims” and so on, instead of positioning oneself as a religious subject, as a believer, “I think” or “as a Christian I believe” etc.

There are differences in articulations between different religions, but also differences in articulations at different school programs.⁷⁵ In the context of the

⁷⁵ This will be further elaborated on in Chapter 8

secularist discourse of religion I will, however, point to the fact that during the 125 lessons in which the observations were carried out, only once did a student openly and on her own initiative in a whole-class discussion position herself as Christian, and then it was in half-class with only eight students present. This, despite the fact that in all the classes there were students that in smaller groups and in private conversations positioned themselves within various Christian traditions. However, there were a number of times in vocational programs where students positioned themselves as Muslims while speaking to the whole class. This I believe was partly related to the fact that they constituted a fairly large group, about a third of the classes where this occurred.⁷⁶ However, students on vocational programs generally took a more personal approach in the classrooms, and talked more about things that can be characterized as private topics compared to programs preparatory for higher education. On the academic programs students' behaviour can be described as having adopted a more rigorous version of the "school-ethos" and the student culture differs between academic and vocational programs in terms of how private the students are expected to be.

During the observations at a program preparatory for higher education, there occurred an instance of a teacher who trespassed the border between the private religiosity of the students in the public sphere of the classroom. Right at the end of the lesson the teacher asked outright "are anyone of you religious?" Some of the students called out that "Henry, he is a Pentecostal!" One of the students who shouted out Henry's name told those seated around him that another friend once attended services with Henry "and it was the worst thing he had ever been through, everyone was screaming and speaking in tongues". Henry himself looked as if he wanted to crawl under his desk and responded very tersely, that yes, he was a Christian. The teacher continued to ask students with an immigrant background if they were Muslims, and they admitted that they were, but I interpreted their body language and their monosyllabic answers as meaning that they really did not want to talk about it in class. The lesson ended and the students quickly left the classroom. It wasn't clear to me why the teacher posed these questions in the class and to my knowledge he never used the information in subsequent classes.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See for example Excerpt 25, 99, 100.

⁷⁷ The episode occurred at the end of a lesson. The teacher had signalled that the lesson was finished, which is why I had turned off my recorder and this example is based on my field notes from 29 February 2012.

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Freedom from religion

Religious freedom, both in the sense of freedom to freely practice religion and freedom to avoid religion made for lively debates. On the one hand, there were clear articulations of "everybody should be allowed to believe whatever they want". In the discussions it became apparent, however, that it is not always easy to know where to draw the line between the right of an individual to freely practice his or her religion and the right to avoid religion. This line seems to be crossed when religious expression has implications for choices of how to live in the community and religion thus becomes visible in the public sphere. Through articulations of freedom of religion, religion was constructed as a social feature that ought to be kept in the private sphere.

Freedom of religion was articulated in relation to specific incidents in which religious freedom was at stake. In these contexts students debated the veil prohibition in France, the minaret ban in Switzerland, the European Court's decision in the case of Italy, where it approved of crucifixes in the classroom, and Geert Wilders' xenophobic statements. In these discussions religion was constructed as a source of conflict. One solution students advocated was to restrict religion in the form of symbols and religious expression in the public sphere:

Student 2: Yeah, we said it's important to have mosques and churches, and everything that there should be every alternative in the community, that there should not only be churches in Sweden, one should be allowed to choose. But then, one should not build one area where there is a church in the middle and everything, because then you feel pretty forced and so, in that community, if everyone goes there. So it's a bit like that ...

Student 3: But we must be able to build a church somewhere, otherwise people might like not know of it

Student 2: Yes, but maybe not in the middle. ..

Teacher: What would happen then do you mean?

Student 2: No, but then one feels, Yes but if like 75% of everyone in the area go there, then you may feel forced

Student 4: Subconsciously

Student 2: Yes, but just that we should go there because it is there, and you live in the area.

Elev 2: Ja vi sa att det är viktigt med att ha moskéer och kyrkor och allting, att det ska finnas alla alternativ i samhället, att det inte bara liksom finns kyrkor i Sverige, man ska få välja. Men sen så att man ska, inte bara bygga ett område där det ligger en kyrka i mitten och allting, för då känner man sig ganska påtvingad liksom så här, i det samhället, om alla går dit. Så det är väl lite så där...

Elev 3: Men samtidigt måste man kunna bygga en kyrka nånstans, annars kanske folk inte känner till den liksom

Elev 2: Ja, men kanske inte liksom mitt i...

Lärare: Vad skulle hända då menar du?

Elev 2: Nej men alltså att man känner, jamen typ att 75 % av alla i det området går dit, då känner man sig kanske påtvingad

Elev 4: Undermedvetet

Elev 2: Ja men precis, att man borde gå dit för att det ligger där, och man bor i det området.

Student 2: I just thought of this with the school that the woman from Italy who wanted her children to have a secular upbringing. But what Charlie said, we understand why, she wants her child to have a non-religious upbringing, and so he sees a cross all day. Because then he starts thinking about that cross, so then there will be a line of thought in his head

Elev 2: Jag tänkte bara på det här med skolan som hon från Italien som ville att hennes barn skulle ha en sekulär uppfostran. Men det som Charlie sa, man förstår ju varför det, hon vill ett hennes barn ska få en ickereligiös uppväxt, och så får han se ett kors hela dagarna. För då börjar han ju tänka på det korset, alltså då blir det en tankegång i hans huvud

Excerpt 37(audio-file 19 October 2011).

It was of great importance to many students that one should be able to avoid being influenced by religion. As in the discussion about children in religious movements mentioned above,⁷⁸ religious symbols were perceived to be somehow “stronger” and more influential than other symbols, such as logos and brand names in commercial advertising.

The secularist discourse had a different impact on representations of different religions, but sometimes the debate about religious freedom had undertones of xenophobia and Islamophobia. When Christianity was discussed as “religion” Christianity was just as problematic as religion in general. However, in comparison to Islam, individualized and secularized Christianity had positive connotations. Islam was articulated as a problem from a secular point of view, and Islam was described as different from other religions:

Student 1: It works real well, just look at Sweden just that particular religion of Christianity, it's as good as it gets, although we're individualists. There aren't any problems until other religions clash. Like Islam, like the example she gave that 41% of Swedes do not want to mix with Muslims. That's exactly what it is about. Only Christianity is as good it gets just because it's about individuality. It should be like that in the rest of the world too.

Student 3: So you think there should be one religion?

Student 1: No religion at all. You may have your own opinion, you can believe whatever you want, and no one's stopping you from it. But you don't belong to organized groups, because that's what leads to conflict. If a

Elev 1: Det funkar ju jättebra, kolla på Sverige just, just den religionen som kristendomen, det funkar hur bra som helst, även om vi är ju individualister. Det uppstår inte problem förrän andra religioner kommer i krock. Som islam, där det exemplet hon drog upp att 41 % av svenskarna inte ville blanda sig med muslimer. Det är precis det det handlar om. Bara kristendom funkar hur bra som helst just för att man är så individuell. Så bör det vara i resten av världen också.

Elev 2: Så du tycker att det ska vara en religion?

Elev 1: Ingen religion alls. Du får ha din egna uppfattning, du får tro precis vad du vill, ingen stoppar dig från det. Men du tillhör inte organiserade grupper, för det är det som leder till konflikter. Kommer en muslim hit med burka och så, då blir det oj, kolla på henne.

⁷⁸ See excerpt 8 and 27.

5. "I AM NEUTRAL!" - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

Muslim comes here with a burqa or so, then we have oh, look at her.

Excerpt 38 (audio-file 6 October 2011).

Islam was articulated as problematic from a freedom of religion perspective. Islam was described as "more" than a religion, an all-encompassing religion and a "life-adjustment". Thus "true" Islam was constructed as incompatible with a secular Western society. In connection with these discussions were also statements that "they" (i.e. Muslims) will actually have to adapt to "us" (i.e., a secular way of life) where religion is kept private and not noticeable in public:

Student 1: Ok, at the risk of sounding a bit cruel or so, but like just because they've got this sort of a religion, they should not be allowed to masquerade. Should they be allowed to enter completely masked, if a Swede would not be allowed to come in with a mask on? One ought to be able to see who it is.

Student 2: Although it is part of their religion, they must accept how we do things in Sweden.

Elev 1: Ok, med risk för att låta lite elak så, men liksom bara för att dom har sån religion, så ska inte dom få lov att klä ut sig. Ska dom få komma in helt maskerade, om inte en svensk skulle få komma in helt maskerad? Liksom, man ska kunna se vem det är.

Elev 2: Även om det tillhör deras religion, så måste de acceptera hur vi har det i Sverige.

Excerpt 39 (audio-file 10 November 2011).

Student 1: We ... we talked about that, in our culture we try to have freedom of expression and religion, that everyone should have the right to have their own beliefs and stuff, and it should be multicultural and everyone can believe what they want. And that's why there can like be a clash between this.

Teacher: Yes. That it is difficult to define where the boundaries lie between the one and the other? Mm. Group three?

Student 3: They argue the case that the minarets can influence, forcing others in Switzerland to become Muslim. But don't church towers also do that, if one is to use the same argument? So if one is to tear down the minarets then one must tear down the church towers too.

Teacher: You mean that they are a bit inconsistent?

Student 2: Yeah, they just look in the direction of Islam, and think; there are like churches all over Europe.

Elev 1: Vi ... vi snackade om att eftersom i samhället så försöker vi ha yttrandefrihet och religionsfrihet, att alla ska få ha sin egna tro och sånt, och det ska vara mångkulturellt och alla ska få tro på vad dom vill. Och därför kan det liksom bli som en krock mellan det.

Lärare: Ja. Att det är svårt att definiera var gränserna går mellan det ena och det andra? Mm. Grupp tre?

Elev 3: Dom argumenterar ju så att minareterna kan påverka, tvinga på dom andra i Schweiz att bli muslimskt. Men gör inte kyrktorn också det, om man ska ta samma argument? Så om man ska riva ner minareter så ska man ju riva ner kyrktorn också.

Lärare: Du menar att dom är lite inkonsekventa?

Elev 2: Ja, dom tittar bara åt islams håll, och tänk er, det är ju kyrkor överallt i Europa liksom.

Excerpt 40 (audio-file 19 October 2011).

Visibly religious expression such as the veil, minarets and church towers were articulated as problematic in the public sphere. In the name of consistency, Student 2 in excerpt 40 notes that if minarets are considered problematic in the public sphere with regard to freedom of religion, this also ought to affect Christian buildings and symbols. The general view in the discussion was that in order to implement freedom of religion in society no religious symbols ought to be allowed in the public sphere at all.

Not everyone agreed with the description of Sweden as secular. For example, one student who described herself as an atheist was of the opinion that she, as an atheist has to defend her choice not to celebrate Christmas and that Sweden is greatly influenced by the Christian tradition:

Student: But for example, I'm an atheist, and people think I'm sick in the head because I don't celebrate Christmas. Sitting at home on Christmas Eve and... So, I mean, the Christmas Eve that I have is just like ANY day, an ordinary Saturday or something. I cannot see anything on TV that is not about Christmas or Christianity or anything related to it. And, the thing is that I have to defend myself because I do not like to see my relatives and celebrate someone's birth. And it's the same with like Easter. The Easter holiday I don't mind, it's all very well, but yes, Easter maybe one doesn't celebrate that much perhaps, but still I have to have time off for something I don't believe in. I mean, I cannot square the fact that we live in, that Sweden is a Christian culture

Elev: Men till exempel, jag är ateist, och att folk tycker att jag är sjuk i huvudet som inte firar jul. Som sitter hemma på julafton och... alltså jag menar, den julafton som jag har är precis som VILKEN dag som helst, en helt vanlig lördag eller nånting. Så kan jag inte se nånting på TV som inte handlar om jul eller kristendom eller nåt som rör det. Och, jamen just att jag måste försvara mig själv för att jag inte gillar att träffa min släkt och fira nåns födelse. Och det är samma sak med typ påsk. Påsklov säger jag inte emot, det är ju bra, men ja, det firar man kanske inte så jättemycket kanske, men ändå att jag ska behöva ha ledigt för nånting jag inte tror på. Jag menar, jag blir inte kvitt att vi lever i, att Sverige är en kristen kultur.

Excerpt 41 (audio-file 19 October 2011).

This student felt that her views were in question because she renounces the celebration of Christian festivals and says that it is not possible to avoid being reminded of this when, for example, watching TV. The quote also illustrates the difficulty of drawing a line between religion and culture. Christmas festivities with Christmas gifts, Christmas food, Christmas dinner with family and friends, and the decorations in the shops, in public places and in homes are widespread. Indeed, references to the Christmas feast are certainly frequent in television during the Christmas season.

5. “I AM NEUTRAL!” - A SECULARIST DISCOURSE

One aspect of the discussion about religion in the classroom is the fact that many of the students did not have a personal relationship with or experience of religious concepts. One could describe this in terms of being “religiously illiterate”(cf. Wright, 2004) or having a “loss of collective memory” (Hervieu-Léger, 2000), where increasingly few share a language to talk about this dimension. This contributes to the secular discourse becoming hegemonic, as many are not aware of other ways of relating to religious matters. This also contributes to making religion a private matter, as religion in many ways is articulated as strange and even dangerous to people who get their only information about religion through the media (Sjöborg, 2012).

Implications and concluding remarks

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate and give examples of the way a secularist discourse was articulated in the RE-classroom. This has been illustrated by the presentation of how a secularist discourse in the classroom was structured around a number of articulation clusters: *Prime time of history*, *Diversity of views*, *A neutral position*, *Criticism of religion*, *Science and faith*, *Individualism*, *Modern myths*, “*Man is the measure of all things*” and *Religion as a private matter*. Together they formed a specific way of talking about world.

During the observations, it was striking how much of the speech in the classroom was marked by ideas of the Enlightenment, perspectives and views of history and religion that take their intellectual legacy from that tradition of thought. When the secularist discourse was at play, certain things appeared as unquestionable and obvious. For instance, there was a conception of time in which history is seen as a linear evolutionary line, implying that humanity goes from lower to higher stages of development, and where religion becomes representative of something obsolete. Other features were not as obvious and this can be described in terms of a discursive struggle. Individualism and pluralism were articulated as core values characterising our time. This also contributed to legitimizing a rejection of religion since religion in general was articulated as contradictory to individualism. In analysing the classroom utterances, it seemed that non-religious and atheistic positions were more significant in this discourse than freedom of choice and pluralism of personal views. In theory, freedom of choice and pluralism encompass a variety of positions, but when the secularist discourse was in play it was not possible to express religious or non-secularist positions. Another sign of the non-religious

supremacy within this discourse was the way students spoke of atheism in terms of normality and neutrality.

In the classrooms it was emphasized that science in many ways has replaced the role of religion. Religion was explained by the quest for explanations: people have at all times sought after answers to “the big questions” of life's origins and explanations for natural phenomena. Today, science has given humanity the answers, and therefore there is no longer any need for religion. According to this line of reasoning, a religious worldview appears irrational, unintelligent, ignorant and like closing one’s eyes to the truth. Instead, reason, critical thinking and scientific methods are ways to gain true knowledge; things that might be reasonably assumed to be true are indisputable guiding principles. In the scientific approach, a basic premise is openness and being prepared to reconsider one’s arguments – if one is proven wrong. It was articulated that science has concluded its explanations, those that religions previously delivered, and that the religious explanations have been proven wrong through scientific methods. Science is thus associated with truth and credibility, and in many cases, put in opposition to a religiously based worldview. In sum, the secularist discourse contributed to a certain perspective on religion which implied a detached approach to religion and excluded religious positions. This might have implications for reaching aims of RE concerning diversity, respect for people of different backgrounds and an understanding of different perspectives.

6. “We are stardust...” - A spiritual discourse

To understand how RE is constructed in practice I seek to identify, describe and analyse the dominant discourses at play in the classroom and how they are related to each other. In the classroom the secularist discourse was strikingly prominent in the conversations. Nonetheless, in the classroom practice there also existed contrasting articulations about religion, religions and worldviews that contained articulations of spirituality and an interpretation of life that might include, or at least did not completely rule out, the possible existence of spiritual or non-empirical dimensions. In this chapter these “cracks and intersections” i.e. signs that were fixed in different and perhaps contradictory ways compared to the secularist discourse are examined (cf. Lindgren, 2006; Risenfors, 2011). These floating signifiers are of central importance to discovering challenges to hegemonic discourses and how the different discourses interplay. In the empirical material students and teachers sometimes referred to a reality beyond human reason and concepts that can be characterized as denoting a spiritual dimension. In the context of this thesis, a spiritual discourse concerns articulations of “ultimate concern” (Tillich, 1965), of the essential conditions of existence, of wonder and awe of life and where the possibility that there might exist supra-empirical phenomenon or beings, i.e. Gods or something divine is not excluded, and that life might have some kind of continuation after death. This challenged in some respects the secularist discourse, and in other ways reinforced it but can nevertheless be seen as part of another discourse. The spiritual discourse was constructed through clusters of articulations of *A spiritual dimension*, *A personal interpretation of life*, *What is a Human Being? Concepts with religious roots* and *Your time on earth*.

A spiritual dimension

The concept of spirituality got its significance in the RE-practice in that it was organized and fixed by other distinctive signs bearing mainly positive connotations, such as: “something bigger”, a feeling, a warmth, love, strength, joy, hope, balance, and harmony. Spirituality was moreover articulated as something you control yourself, you are not “born into” or “get

indoctrinated into” something, which being religious was associated to. Spirituality was thus linked to individualism and individual choices, which was stressed as crucial.

In RE-lessons there was a way of talking about religion and religions that primarily did not focus on traditional religious organizations and practices but more to concepts such as spirituality, holiness, and a possible life after death. When teachers and students used the word spirituality [Swedish: *andlighet*] it concerned a sense of the existence of “something bigger”, some kind of divine power or energy and issues concerning a part of life that science cannot provide reliable answers to, such as, life after death. A critical stance towards religion was comparatively more frequently articulated than positions that can be characterised as “spiritual”, but articulations of this kind were voiced and they were used in a tentative and non-absolute way. Simultaneously, to declare a spiritual position or to articulate that one counted on a spiritual dimension in life was more common than to describe oneself as a part of any of the traditional world religions.

Student 1: But something like that I have, maybe I can believe that there is something supernatural, whether it is a good or evil force or it may be the...

Student 2: But then you're not like CHRISTIAN, I mean someone who really really believes in something.

Student 1: No.

Elev 1: Men sånt har jag, jag kanske kan tro att det finns nåt övernaturligt, om det är en ond eller god kraft eller om det kan vara det...

Elev 2: Men då är du ju inte så här KRISTEN, jag menar sån som är verkligen verkligen troende på nånting.

Elev 1: Nej.

Excerpt 42 (audio-file 13 October 2011).

Thus there was strong reluctance to articulate positions within the Christian religious tradition, but to see oneself as encompassing a spiritual dimension in a more vague sense was acceptable. The concept Christian had in the above excerpt connotations of extremism, “the kind that really really believes in something”. Renouncing traditional religions but still accepting aspects of spirituality was articulated in various ways:

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

In my world there is no god with a capital G. There is no holy scripture to follow or any prophet that preaches what s/he thinks you ought to think. I believe in a spirit, a feeling, a soul, a warmth or why not call it love?

I min värld finns det ingen gud med stort G. Det finns ingen helig skrift att följa eller någon profet som predikar om vad h-n tycker att du bör tänka. Jag tror på en andlighet, en känsla, en själ, en värme eller varför inte kalla det kärleken?

Excerpt 43 (from student essay).⁷⁹

This student articulated, in line with an individualistic approach to life, a view that she does not put her trust in the form of religiosity she associated with traditional religions. Nonetheless, she described a spiritual dimension of life which somewhat exceeds the empirical material existence. Spirituality is often defined as a somewhat broader concept than religiosity and involves more aspects and dimensions of human existence (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). If religion is about external phenomena such as buildings, religious doctrines and formalized rituals and contact with a transcendental God that exists outside man, spirituality concerns personal experience, finding the true, inner and authentic self and connecting with the divine within (Frisk & Åkerbäck, 2013; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Woodhead, 2010). This distinction could be articulated in this way:

I belong to those who don't know what to believe. I am that kind of person who wants to know for sure what something means before I get involved in anything, mostly to avoid being drawn into the unknown. I can, to a certain extent, believe in a good God who is there for everybody but it might not need to be a "religious God", rather more on the spiritual side. I somehow think that what I call God is where I get my strength from, my joy, hope, will, and the kind of love that you cannot get anywhere else.

Jag ingår i dem som inte vet vad de ska tro på. Jag är en sådan person som vill ha klart för mig vad någonting innebär innan jag ger mig in i något, mest för att undvika att dras med i det okända. Jag kan till viss del tro på en god Gud som finns för alla men som kanske inte behöver vara en "religiös Gud" utan mer åt det andliga hållet. Jag tror på något sätt att vad jag kallar Gud är därifrån jag får och hämtar min styrka, glädje, hopp, vilja samt den typ av kärlek som inte går att få tag på någon annanstans.

Excerpt 44 (from student essay).

Even this student distinguished between traditional religiosity and spirituality. That the articulation is tentative and uncertain is also characteristic for the

⁷⁹ In this chapter several quotes from student texts are included where students articulated positions that can be seen as challenging the secularist discourse. It seems to be easier to formulate these views in individual written assignments than in the classrooms, although this type of statement also occurred there. I will return to a discussion of this.

spiritual discourse. Unlike a religious position, a spiritual position was articulated as easily combining with a scientific view of existence:

That is where my private religious side shows too. For me, balance, harmony, and as I said, control are important. I believe in the scientific story of creation about Big Bang and even other things such as atomic research. Before Big Bang and after this life, then? That is where spirituality sets in. Knowing what happened and is happening, I cannot, but I believe in life before and after this

Där syns min privatreligiösa sida också. För mig är balans, harmoni och som sagt kontroll viktigt. Jag tror på vetenskapens skapelseberättelse om Big Bang och även annat såsom atomforskning. Innan den Stora Smällen och efter Detta Livet, då? Där tar andligheten vid. Att veta vad som hänt och händer kan jag ej, men jag tror på ett liv både före och efter detta.

Excerpt 45 (from the student essay).

This student labelled things beyond what science could explain as spirituality. She also positioned herself as privately religious. As mentioned in the previous chapter, private religiosity was in the classrooms presented as the most common form of religiosity in Sweden. On the one hand, the Swedish population was described as secular, but on the other hand, a majority were said to embrace a spiritual dimension as part of their personal interpretation of life:

Teacher: We [*in Sweden*] are unusual, a rather unusual nation, but maybe not as exceptional as we think. Because actually 80% of us somehow believe in something beyond the physical. About 15% of the population of Sweden believe that there is, or have a personal God. 35 % that there is something spiritual, some spirit or life force. 28 % [*belong to the group that thinks*]: I do not really know what to think. Then you haven't said no, but you haven't said yes either, and these people usually are called agnostics. I cannot say yes or I cannot say no, because I have not really made up my mind. But one ends up, so to speak in the upper half here. And then about 20 %, people who really have said no to this, there is no God or any spiritual life force, everything is entirely physical. And then one would never think that it could look like this in the world's most secular country, as Sweden sometimes is portrayed. And it is perhaps that our state, so to speak, our state, our school system, our common room, it is very de-Christianized. But it

Lärare: Vi [*i Sverige*] är lite ovanliga, ett lite ovanligt folk, men kanske inte så ovanliga som vi tror. Eftersom det faktiskt är så att 80 % av oss på nåt sätt tror på nånting utanför det materiella. Ungefär 15 % av Sveriges befolkning tror att det finns, eller har en personlig Gud. 35 % att det finns något andligt, nån ande eller livskraft. 28 % [*tillhör gruppen som tänker*]: jag vet inte riktigt vad jag ska tro. Då har man ju inte sagt nej, men man har inte sagt ja heller, och såna personer brukar man kalla för agnostiker. Jag kan inte säga ja eller jag kan inte säga nej, för jag har inte riktigt bestämt mig. Men man hamnar ju så att säga på den övre delen här. Och så då ungefär 20 %, dom som verkligen har sagt nej till det här, det finns inte någon Gud eller någon andlig livskraft, allting är helt och hållet materiellt. Och då skulle man ju kunna tänka sig att det inte alls skulle se ut så här i världens mest sekulariserade land som Sverige ibland beskrivs som. Och det är väl kanske lite grann det att vår stat så att säga, vår stat, vårt skolväsende, vårt gemensamma rum, det är väldigt avkristnat. Men det behöver ju inte

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

doesn't say that WE as individuals are. Just because you live in a secular country, you don't have to be a secular person yourself.

säga att VI som personer är det. Bara för att man lever i ett sekulärt land, måste man ju inte vara en sekulär person själv.

Excerpt 46 (Audio file 3 October 2011).

The teacher concluded that 80% of Swedes can be described as spiritual in one sense or another. She made a distinction between a secular society and a secular person and seems to equate being a secular person to being a non-religious person, and she did not differentiate between nation, state or society. This quote is from a context where the teacher tried to describe the kinds of ideas that dominate Swedish society. Before this excerpt the teacher had spoken of how unique and unusual we are in Sweden, referring to the “Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map” (World Value Survey, 2015) where Sweden scores the highest of all countries both on self-expression and secular-rational values compared to survival values and traditional values. Do the teacher's claim that 80% of Swedes can be described as spiritual disturb the image of Sweden as the most secular country in the world? On the one hand, the teacher made the distinction between a secular society and a secular person – that a person might live in a secular country and still be an individual believer. It is accordingly doubtful whether these articulations challenge a secularist discourse about religion since religion becomes a matter of choice through the beliefs of the individual and entirely deprived of its social significance. Nonetheless, these articulations about the Swedish population being predominantly spiritual allowed for positions outside the secularist discourse.

Sometimes seemingly paradoxical positions were articulated. A student on the technology programme, positioned himself as “not religious whatsoever”. During the same conversation⁸⁰ he said that he had several friends who sang in a Satanist band, and this was something he was uncomfortable about due to the religious aspects of his friend's activities and convictions. He also said that he promised his mother never to do “spirit of the glass”.⁸¹ I asked why, if he still does not believe there is anything divine or religious “whatsoever”? He could not quite explain - he said he was scared of “ghosts and stuff”, and in the end he concluded, “I do not believe in God, but I do not want to disturb Him” “Disturbing” seemed to be the same as getting involved with occult things.

⁸⁰ This conversation was not recorded, which is why I refer to this episode based on my field notes from 5 March 2012.

⁸¹ A game well known to many school-children and a simplified version of the Ouija-board with roots in spiritualism and a way to get in contact with spirits.

When Heelas and Woodhead (2005) or Frisk and Åkerbäck (2013) describe the type of spirituality that they believe partly is replacing traditional religiosity they refer to ideas emanating from “the holistic environment”, i.e., environments that are usually associated with New Age, New Religious Movements and esoteric movements. In the classroom discussions, it was rare for anyone to voice explicit references to the holistic environment, but in the written material, for example, several students said that they thought that the description of them in terms of the zodiac signs really matched and that the horoscope could provide guidance in life:

When I miss having a God as a spirit that explains things, I have the ancient art of the "horoscope". I do believe in the zodiac personality descriptions. I was born in the sign of Libra. The stars say I'm charming, sociable, intelligent, positive in its so-called polarity, diplomatic, loyal, have trouble making decisions, prefer balance and harmony – “the scales” have to be in balance.

Excerpt 47 (from student text).

The attributes of the zodiac signs tell me what personality type I am and what is right for me. As I said, this may seem a little loopy in many people's eyes, but I guess this is yet another sign of how important it is for me/us to feel secure in life, especially in these confused teen-age years when the first (?) identity crisis knocks at the door and must be negotiated. I think the meaning of the zodiac signs for me in my life has to do with the above-mentioned compromise I was “juggling with”. I mix rational science and the mythology of the zodiac/horoscope to find my own balance. Both science (learning style) and the stars (the zodiac) explain who I am, but it feels like only the stars explain why. While religious believers find their security and support in their religion, I find security in who I am, answers to why and support when I occasionally lose my balance

Excerpt 48 (From student text).

När jag saknar Gud som en andlighet som förklarar saker så har jag den urgamla konsten om ”horoskop”. Jag tror nämligen på stjärntecknens personlighetsbeskrivningar. Jag är född i vågens tecken. Stjärnorna säger att jag är charmig, social, intelligent, positiv i sin så kallade polaritet, diplomatisk, lojal, har beslutssvårigheter, föredrar balans och harmoni – balans mellan ”vågskålarna”.

Stjärntecknens olika egenskaper berättar för mig vilken personlighetstyp jag är och vad som är rätt och riktigt för mig. Som sagt kan det här verka flummigt i många personers ögon, men jag antar att det här är ännu ett tecken på hur viktigt det är för mig/oss med trygghet i livet, inte minst i dessa förvirrade tonåren när den första (?) identitetskrisen knackar på dörren och ska förhandlas med. Jag tror att stjärntecknens betydelse för mig i mitt liv har med kompromissen jag ”bollade med” ovan att göra. Jag blandar den rationella vetenskapen och det mytologiska i stjärntecken/horoskop för att hitta min egen balans. Både vetenskapen (lärostilen) och stjärnorna (stjärntecken) förklarar vem jag är, men det känns som om bara stjärnorna förklarar varför. Medan troende personer hittar sin trygghet och stöd i sin religion hittar jag trygghet i vem jag är, svar på varför och stöd när jag stundtals tappar balansen

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

To believe in zodiacal signs might be perceived as irrational from a scientific secularistic point of view, but these students do not think so, and spirituality is in this sense not constructed as contradictory to science. The stars provide answers through reason. The spiritual dimension in the shape of trust in zodiacal signs thus contributes to providing meaning and coherence in life, which the last student seems to think, in line with Weber (1965 [1930]), that science has difficulties to do.

As revealed in the previous chapter, the concept of religion was perceived as a negative concept in the classroom, but simultaneously spirituality and related concepts had more positive undertones. This difference is well established in various studies (Frisk & Åkerbäck, 2013; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Hill et al., 2000; Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008; Woodhead, 2010). Research descriptions of spirituality refer to things such as an inner personal experience, to be true, authenticity, finding an inner balance, contact with the divine within or discovering the true real self. This spirituality has more the nature of an attitude, an approach to life and can be exercised in different places, during a walk, when practicing yoga, when taking a bath, etc. (Frisk & Åkerbäck, 2013). The concept of spirituality was in the RE-practice articulated as something positive and uncomplicated, compatible with the individualism in the secularist discourse. In contrast to religiosity, it did not seem problematic to unite spirituality, with a scientific worldview. The articulations of spirituality can also be seen as an example of positions that do not fit in the traditional distinction between religious and non-religious but can be described as semi-secular (af Burén, 2015) or a “third position” (Gustavsson, 2013).

A personal interpretation of life

This section will describe and analyse what a personal interpretation of life might be and how it was constructed in the classroom. It was articulated that "all people have to create/formulate their own interpretation of life, your own worldview".

The articulation, “a personal interpretation of life” was used by teachers in teaching and assignments, which is why the teacher’s voices and formulations initially dominate this section. During the RE-lessons there occurred discussions of what a worldview and a philosophy of life is. What is an interpretation of life? What and where do we come from? What is the meaning

of life? Two of the classes were assessed based on their ability to describe their own worldview and interpretation of life, but the tasks and the instructions had slightly different designs. One of the classes was to describe their personal “holy space”:

Holy Spaces

Where do you go when it gets to be too much? Where do you find strength? Or in whom? Where is your holy space? What is important in life? What controls your life? Who rules? What do you base your decisions on? What is right and wrong – in your opinion, and why is it so?

We all have a life story and a worldview. Many times the two are related - the story of our life is perhaps what has influenced our worldview or our worldview has helped to influence our lives and govern the choices we have made and are making.

We all have a self-image and a worldview that we have put together and are putting together – throughout life – with the building blocks of life around us. It can be from other people, thoughts already contemplated, worldviews of various kinds or entirely new things. Or maybe we are building the opposite – to rebel?

This project is about life (but so are all our projects) - your own and someone else's.

Heliga Rum

Var tar du vägen när det blir för mycket? Var hämtar du styrka? Eller hos vem? Var finns ditt heliga rum? Vad är viktigt i livet? Vad styr ditt liv? Vem styr? Vad ligger till grund för dina val? Vad är rätt och fel – enligt dig och varför är det så?

Vi bär alla på en livshistoria och på en livsåskådning. Ofta hänger dessa ihop – vår livshistoria är kanske den som byggt vår livsåskådning eller så har vår livsåskådning hjälpt till att bygga våra liv och styra de val vi gjort och gör.

Vi har alla en självbild och en världsbild som vi byggt och bygger på - livet ut – av byggstenar från livet runt omkring oss. Det kan vara från andra människor, tankegods som redan finns tänkt, livsåskådningar av olika slag eller helt nya saker. Eller kanske bygger vi tvärtom - för att göra uppror? Detta projekt handlar om livet (fast det gör väl alla våra projekt) – ditt eget och någon annans.

Excerpt 49 (from the project plan handed out to the students).

The premise articulated in the classroom for this project was that all people have both a worldview and a “holy space” i.e. something that gives the individual strength and meaning, which may be religiously influenced or not. In this project, students would describe her or his own worldview and meet a person who had a radically different worldview and compare the two. They had five weeks at their disposal, and this constituted the entire RE course. A worldview was in this classroom presented as consisting of four dimensions or levels:

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

1. An ethos or basic view of life, positive or negative
2. An ethical dimension with notions of right and wrong
3. Ontological conceptions of life and humankind
4. Notions of a transcendent, non-material reality

Excerpt 50 (writing from the whiteboard, filed notes 29 September 2011).

The project *Holy Spaces* draws heavily on the tradition of worldview-studies emanating from Jeffner’s (1973) definition of worldview. His definition includes theories about humankind and the world, a central value system and a basic attitude. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this approach has been frequently used in Swedish research of worldviews ever since the 1970s (see for example Bråkenhielm, 2001). The teacher described the fourth dimension, notions of the transcendent, in this way:

Teacher: The fourth level then ... [*draws a pyramid on the board*]. Here [*at the top*] is the religious level. So in some way, some sort of divinity, something transcendent. If something is transcendent it is outside what is worldly. It is beyond the physical world, but I mean, in front of me there are lots of oxygen and nitrogen atoms that are invisible. But the transcendent is thus beyond all that we possibly can grasp and have any understanding of, [*all that*] exists and is observable, yes, beyond all that. And then there is the divine. So if we imagine that we are looking at worldviews, one can imagine a worldview without God, it stops so to speak on the third [*level*], or maybe you have something else up there. Here you might have your best friend Tylor, who you follow. Here you might have your charismatic leader, here one might have... Maradona if you are interested in soccer, what do I know? It is still the case that one can have a worldview without anything divine, but still have something up here, but it is still the case that it's not divine, so to speak, it is by definition not a religion, although there are both religious studies psychologists and sociologists who believe that football can be seen as a religion, but it does not actually have this divine aspect.

Lärare: Den fjärde nivån då... [*ritar en pyramid på tavlan*] Här [*längst upp*] kommer det religiösa. Alltså på nåt sätt nån form av gudomlighet, någonting som är transcendent. Om nåt är transcendent så är det utomvärldsligt. Det är utanför den här materiella världen, men jag menar, framför mig är det massvis med syre och kväveatomer som man inte ser. Men det transcendentia är alltså utanför allt det som vi överhuvudtaget kan greppa och ha nån uppfattning om [*och som*] finns och syns, ja, bortanför allt det. Och där finns då det gudomliga. Så om man då tänker sig att vi tittar på livsåskådningar, så kan man tänka sig att en livsåskådning utan Gud, den stannar så att säga på den tredje [*nivån*], eller så kanske man har nånting annat där uppe. Här kanske man har sin bästa kompis Tylor, som man följer. Här kanske man har sin karismatiske ledare, här kanske man har... Maradona om man är fotbollsintresserad, vad vet jag? Det är fortfarande så att man kan ha en livsåskådning som är utan någonting gudomligt, men fortfarande ha nånting här uppe, men det är fortfarande så att det är ju inte gudomligt så att säga, den är per definition inte en religion även om det finns både religionspsykologer och sociologer som anser att fotboll kan ses som en religion, men den har ju faktiskt inte det här

When one has a God in the package, then that person's worldview becomes a religious worldview. If you always have this triangle, I think, you can always meet people because then you can always ask them, ok what does your triangle look like? Mine looks like this.

gudomliga. När man har en Gud med i paketet, då har ens livsåskådning blivit en religiös livsåskådning. Om man alltid har den här triangeln tänker jag, så kan man alltid möta människor för då kan man alltid fråga dom, ok hur ser din triangel ut? Min ser ut så här.

Excerpt 51 (audio-file 29 September 2011).

The teacher thus concluded that all people do have a worldview, but not all have this fourth dimension of worldview, characterized by something transcendent. At the same time, she explained that a certain worldview can have this fourth dimension without the divine, that idols and charismatic leaders can fulfil the same function as a transcendent divinity.

The other class where questions of life also had a central role had a slightly different approach. There, the life-question perspective was part of a final assignment for the students who during a semester had worked with world religions from the perspective of conflict, community, and ethics:

Meaning and interpreting the meaning of life

Where do we come from, who are we?
What is the meaning of life?
In the theme *Meaning and interpreting the meaning of life*, we discuss these existential questions based on world religions, other worldviews and our own perspective. In these discussions we also try to include current social issues, technological developments and also apply historical and future perspectives.

The overall goal is that the student will gain new perspectives on existential issues and achieve higher self-knowledge by formulating his or her own worldview and express his or her full potential by making use of both emotion and reason, logic and aesthetics.

Assignment: Based upon world religions and worldviews, reflect upon your views regarding the meaning of life.

Mening och livstolkning

Var kommer vi ifrån, vilka är vi? Vad är meningen med livet?

I temaområdet *Mening och livstolkning* diskuterar vi dessa existentiella frågor utifrån världsreligioners, andra livsåskådningars och vårt eget perspektiv.

Vi försöker också i samtalet kring dessa frågor väva in aktuella samhällsfrågor, den tekniska utvecklingen och också anlägga både historiska och framtida perspektiv.

Det övergripande målet är att eleven skall få nya perspektiv på existentiella frågor och nå högre självkännedom genom att formulera sin egen livsåskådning och ge uttryck för hela sin förmåga genom att använda sig av både känsla och förnuft, logik och estetik.

Uppgift: Reflektera kring din syn på meningen med livet utifrån världsreligioner och livsåskådningar.

Excerpt 52 (from description of the theme *Meaning and interpreting the meaning of life*).

The design of this task aims more clearly than in *Holy Spaces* at helping students to reflect upon life in relation to world religions and worldviews, while in *Holy*

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

Spaces there was a greater focus on the student's own perceptions, but both components were included in both projects. These projects can be seen at the backdrop of life question pedagogy. Life question pedagogy has a strong tradition in the Swedish religious education. In the curriculum from 1969, *Lgr 69* (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1969), the concept of questions of life was introduced and Hartman (2000) argues that by using the children's existential questions instead of beliefs and dogmas as a starting point in the teaching of RE, much of the “objectivity cramp” many teachers experienced, as they were afraid of not being objective enough, was dissolved. This approach also worked well in an increasingly heterogenic, pluralistic and postmodern society (cf. Dahlin, 2004).

It was clear in both of these tasks that student's personal development and self-knowledge were seen as important by the teachers. The subjective element, the student's own thoughts were a central part of the instruction, but it differed whether this was the main goal of teaching or if it was a tool for helping students to learn about, analyse and understand different worldviews. Since the RE course has a very limited time at its disposal, several of the teachers in this study expressed the feeling that there is a contradiction between having students reflect about their own worldview and interpretation of life versus knowledge and analysis of others' worldviews and interpretations of life. This can be seen as an example of the tensions within the subject, between learning about, learning from, between religious education as knowledge orientation or existential reflection and personal development (Almén, 2000).

Even those teachers in this study that didn't explicitly use life question pedagogy tried to use different ways of getting students to see similarities of their own personal approach and interpretations presented in teaching. By giving the student specific questions on specific details in different religions, the students were encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs. For example, when discussing whether Buddhism can be perceived as a life-affirming religion or not:

Student 1: I think its self-denial, because it, I think, is what we talked about that one should be celibate and not have any part in it. I've lived with, or have grown up with a mom and dad and a brother, lots of friends, boyfriends, that I have it near me all the time. And so it feels really weird not to have

Elev 1: Jag kan stå för det livsförnekande, för det kan jag tycka, det vi pratade om att man ska leva i celibat och inte ha någon del i det. Jag har levt med, eller vuxit upp med att ha en mamma och pappa och ha en bror, massa kompisar, pojkvänner, att jag har det nära mig hela tiden. Och då känns det jättekonstigt om

anything like that. Like, according to them, you can live better without.

Teacher: Mm... What is it in Buddhist notions that says that you should not have these close relationships?

Student 1: They should not have any desires.

Student 2: Because it will end in suffering.

Teacher: It will end in suffering of some kind.

Student 2: But I think at the same time even though everything has an end, it's clear that it's really hard then. But you move on, and so you still have a memory of what has been good. That is, if my mother were to die, and if we all died tomorrow, then I won't remember her because she died, but rather I will surely remember my mother because she was my mom and I like her.

Student 3: Linda's not going to think that oh, I wish I'd never known her, then I would have avoided this suffering.

Student 2: Then the suffering would have been not having had a mom instead.... But as they are brought up to believe that they should not have any desire, and they should not be like that, then surely it is not self-denial for them. For them it's life-affirming and they want it that way, they think it is good based on their faith and it...

Teacher: Very good Hanna, you have touched on an important point, that they are perhaps experiencing a peace of mind, in that not...

Student 2: The monks do at least.

Teacher: Yes, one can experience something in a different way, you can experience a peace of mind that can fill, if you fill yourselves with relationships, then they might fill themselves with something else.

Excerpt 53 (audio-file 10 November 2011).

man inte ska ha nåt sånt. Som att, enligt dom, så lever man bättre utan.

Lärare: Mm... Vad för tanke i buddhismen är det att du inte ska ha dom här nära relationerna?

Elev 1: Dom ska inte ha några begär.

Elev 2: För det kommer att sluta med ett lidande.

Lärare: Det kommer att sluta med ett lidande på nåt sätt.

Elev 2: Men det tycker jag samtidigt även fast allting har ett slut, det är klart att det är jättejobbigt då. Men man går vidare, och så har man ändå ett minne från det som var bra. Det vill säga, om min mamma skulle dö, och om vi alla dör imorgon, då kommer ju inte jag att minnas henne för att hon dog utan jag kommer ju att komma ihåg min mamma för att hon var min mamma och jag tycker om henne.

Elev 3: Linda kommer ju inte att tänka att åh, jag skulle inte haft henne, då skulle jag sluppit detta lidande.

Elev 2: Då hade det ju vart ett lidande att jag inte hade nån mamma istället... Men samtidigt som att dom är uppvuxna att dom inte ska ha några begär, och dom ska inte ha sånt, så är det väl inte nåt livsförnekande för dom. För dom är det ju livsbejakande och som dom, dom vill ha det så, dom tycker att det är bra utifrån sin tro och det...

Lärare: Jättebra Hanna, du har varit inne på en viktig sak, att dom upplever kanske en sinnesro i och med att inte ...

Elev 2: Munkarna gör väl

Lärare: Ja, att man kan uppleva nånting på ett annat sätt, man kan uppleva en sinnesro som kan fylla, om ni fyller er själva med relationer, så kanske dom fyller sig själva med nånting annat.

Students here discuss the Buddhist concepts of desire and suffering as they understand these concepts and relate them to their reality and interpretation of life. What is it that the teacher in this conversation encourages and thereby enforces? The teacher wants students to look at the Buddhist beliefs from different perspectives. When the student Hanna points out that even if she

6. "WE ARE STARDUST..." - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

herself does not share the view that everything in life is suffering, she still believes that others may come to different conclusions, and this is met with a positive response from the teacher. But at the same time, people who occupy this position are not present in the classroom and the Buddhists encompassing the idea of *dukkha* are easily made into "the Other", although there were students of different faiths in this classroom, but to my knowledge none were of the Buddhist traditions. The teacher concluded that students present in the classroom create meaning through relationships but that Buddhists construct meaning and peace of mind through their faith.

To illustrate how the spiritual discourse was articulated when the students were asked to reflect on their personal worldview and the above-mentioned fourth level concerning the transcendent, six examples from student-written assignments will be provided:

I think there is a "higher power", but it is not a God or a person. I cannot describe what it is, but somewhere there is something that keeps an eye on us. I also believe in rebirth, but it's not necessarily the case that you become a person again, you could just as well come back as an animal or plant. I have always (since I was little) believed that in the next life you become what you love most in the life you are in right now, so in my last life I was something or someone who loved a girl or woman, and in that way I became that in this life.

As I wrote before, there is no God for me, but I believe in a higher power in the afterlife. I believe in spirits and energy. Death is not the end but more like when you move on to another dimension. Almost like a TV game, when you pass one level you start on the next.

My belief is that if there is something immense, then it is something watching over us. Maybe not an old man sitting atop a cloud but something spiritual. I think there is something supernatural out there, whatever it may be.

For me, God is something that cannot be described. I do not see him as a human being but as a superhuman force that is in

Jag tror att det finns en "högre makt", men det är inte en Gud eller en person. Jag kan inte beskriva vad det är, men någonstans finns det något som har koll på oss. Jag tror även på pånyttfödelse, men det är inte nödvändigtvis så att man blir en människa igen utan man kan lika gärna bli ett djur eller växt. Jag har alltid (sedan jag var liten) trott att man i nästa liv blir det man älskar mest i det liv man befinner sig i just nu, så i mitt förra liv var jag något eller någon som älskade en tjej eller kvinna och på det sätt blev jag det i detta livet.

Som jag skrev tidigare finns det ingen Gud för mig, men jag tror på en högre makt i livet efter. Jag tror på andar och energier. Döden är inget slut utan mer som när man går vidare till en annan dimension. Nästan som ett TV-spel, när man klarat en level börjar man på nästa.

Min tro är att om det finns något kolossalt, så är det något som vakar över oss. Kanske inte en gubbe som sitter uppe på ett moln men något andligt. Jag tror att det finns något övernaturligt där ute, vad det nu kan vara.

För mig är Gud något som inte kan beskrivas. Jag ser honom inte som en människa utan som en övermänsklig kraft som på något sätt finns i

some way in each of us, whether they are believers or not. Since I myself am not entirely a believer and am unsure of God's existence, it still feels good, the thought of having someone by my side.

It's like this, I am a Christian but not a strong believer like many other Christians, but I believe that God exists somewhere and wants to help us people who live on the earth below, because He's the one who created us. I'm sure of this when I think there is some divine Lord out there around the world who wants what is good for all the people, and when we humans need God's help, I believe that the Lord is there and wants to help. That's why I ask for God's help when I need it. However, I only ask if there are big things happening when I need help and I do not think I'll manage. I believe that God helps me, although, it can mostly be my imagination, but when I pray I feel like God is trying to help me in the best way because it often turns out that there are good results after I have asked.

Who is God? For me, God is a power that exists in our minds. A force that gives us strength every day. It is God we can pray to when we are at a disadvantage and need comfort but also when we have to make hard choices in life. I neither go to church nor read the Bible, but I can believe anyway. Honestly, God is for me something you keep to yourself.

Excerpt 54 (from student's assignments)

When I started reading the students' texts, I was really surprised. Based on how the students had talked about religious dimensions of existence I was not expecting 17 of 22 students to describe that they embraced beliefs in a higher power, spirits and energies and the divine as a supernatural power. In the examples above, we also see illustrations of students that believe in reincarnation, which seems to be a common perception among many of the students. The students above describe the divine as a shelter where they seek to find support and comfort. What is the reason that this did not come up in the classroom utterances? Is it as the last student writes, that God is something that one keeps to oneself? Students obviously had other thoughts than what was

var och en av oss, oavsett om man är troende eller inte. Eftersom jag själv inte är helt troende och osäker på Guds existens känns ändå tanken på att ha någon vid sin sida bra.

Vi säger såhär, jag är kristen men inte starkt troende som många andra kristna, men jag tror att Gud finns någonstans och vill hjälpa oss människor som lever nere på jorden, på grund av att det är han som skapat oss. Jag är säker på min sak när jag tror att det finns någon gudomlig herre där ute runt om världen som vill alla människor gott, och när vi människor behöver Guds hjälp så tror jag att Herren finns där och vill hjälpa till. Det är därför jag ber om Guds hjälp när jag behöver den. Dock ber jag bara om det är stora saker som sker då jag behöver hjälp som jag inte tror att jag ska klara av. Jag tror på att Gud hjälper mig, dock kan det för det mesta vara inbillning från mig, men när jag ber känns det som Gud försöker hjälpa mig på bästa sätt eftersom det ofta visar goda resultat efter att jag bätt.

Vem är Gud? För mig är Gud en kraft som finns i våra sinnen. En kraft där vi hämtar ork om dagarna. Det är Gud vi kan be till när vi är i underläge och behöver tröst men även när vi ska ta ställning till tunga val i livet. Jag går varken i kyrkan eller läser bibeln, men jag kan tro ändå. Ärligt talat är Gud för mig någonting man har för sig själv.

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

possible to express in the classroom. But most stress that they are not “strong believers”, and their beliefs are leaning more towards spirituality than religion.

Of those who position themselves as lacking the spiritual dimension some express that they can be “envious” of people who have a strong faith, but articulate a positive or at least respectful attitude toward people who embrace these kinds of beliefs which were rare in the classroom discourse. Instead of dismissing believers as feeble-minded and deluded as we saw in the previous chapter, the students expressed that there possibly also existed positive aspects of belonging to a religion, and they expressed an understanding of what it could possibly mean to people even if they themselves were not part of this.

When the spiritual discourse was at play, the distinction between the materialist worldview and a belief in the transcendent was not very clear, and students expressed both pantheistic and transcendent views, while simultaneously describing themselves as atheists. In line with this are the following excerpts from a group of male students in a conversation with a teacher. They just had an oral examination about Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the three students clearly positioned themselves as atheists and at the end the teacher asked a general question about how they view life:

Teacher: But what do you say, does it not feel a little scary that you just are born and die and that’s all there is?

Student 1: I’d love to believe in something

Teacher: He [*the pastor the class met on a study visit*] sees this as a proof of God’s existence, that people feel that there must be something, he said so himself.

Student 1: I’m not completely closed to the idea of some sort of creator but not a God, somehow. I am more, have a tendency toward, if I were to believe in something that was more supernatural than Big Bang, it would be more like the idea that we are in a lab. Or that we are an experiment for someone else. Because from what I see, it’s not impossible. Size does not matter as much as, well, the universe, what is it when there is something, the universe may be just one marble in...

Teacher: A marble yes, that is a scary thought...

Student 2: I think there are many who feel that they, there must be a creator because everything is so, yes, intelligent design and

Lärare: Men vad säger ni, känns det inte lite skrämmande att man bara föds och dör och så är det allting?

Elev 1: Jag skulle jättegärna vilja tro på nånting.

Lärare: Det ser ju han [*pastorn som klassen mött under ett studiebesök*] som ett gudsbevis, att människor känner att det måste finnas, han sa det ju själv.

Elev 1: Jag är inte helt stängd för idén av nån sorts skapare fast inte en Gud, på nåt sätt. Jag är mer, lite lagd åt det, om jag skulle tro på nånting som var mer övernaturligt än Big Bang så skulle det rikta sig mer åt att vi är i ett lab. Eller att vi är ett experiment för nån annan. För vad jag ser så är det inte omöjligt. Storleken har inte så stor betydelse som, liksom, universum, vad är det när det finns nånting, universum kanske bara är en puttekula i...

Lärare: En puttekula, ja, det är en läskig tanke...

Elev 2: Jag tänker, det är ju många som känner att dom, det måste finnas en skapare för att allting är så, ja intelligent design och allt

everything like that. But wouldn't it be even more amazing if all of this happened by accident. We are like one of many many millions and billions that could happen, and so it happened

Teacher: As proof, many times, one can still find evidence of how things have changed, in animals and humans and the like, that one can find evidence for. We've changed. It is a kind of development, that it might well be said that there is evidence for, Darwin and

Student 2: But there are many who do not believe in it too...

Student 1: I'm thinking about that, how we would look to someone who was studying us, who lives in a world where the speed of light does not matter, so time has not the same function, so they might like how our society has developed and suddenly a rocket is shot into space and we landed on the moon, and so we go back and all that. One can like see how we expand into the universe on a creation of five minutes ...

Then I'm pretty convinced that the Big Bang happened, and that we, in that there are relatively concrete, anyways. It's also a bit cool that we are part of the universe, everything is in us and we are in everything, we are stardust. All the stars we see are made up of the same components.

Teacher: Are you not afraid? "what the heck, what am I – little me – in all this"?

Student 3: But do people really feel small? When you have, if you look up at the sky and think that all this is in me and I am in everything...

Teacher: Well, yes. Then one is immense. I exist.

Student 3: I feel immense when I look up at the sky.

Excerpt 55 (audio-file 14 March 2012).

vad det är. Men borde inte det inte vara ännu mer fantastiskt ifall allt det här hände av en slump. Vi är liksom en på många många miljoners miljarder som kunde hända och så hände det

Lärare: Som bevis, många gånger, man kan ju ändå belägga hur saker och ting har förändrats, med djur och vi människor och så där, det kan man ju belägga. Vi har ju förändrats. Det är en sorts utveckling, det skulle man ju kunna säga att det finns bevis för Darwin och

Elev 2: Men det är ju många som inte tror på det också...

Elev 1: Jag funderar på det, hur vi skulle se ut för nån som studerade oss, som lever i en värld där ljushastigheten inte spelar nån roll, så tiden har inte samma funktion så dom kanske liksom hur vårt samhälle har utvecklats och helt plötsligt stoppades det upp en raket i rymden och så landade vi på månen och så åker vi tillbaka och så. Man ser liksom hur vi expanderar i universum på en skapa av fem minuter... Sen är jag ganska övertygad om att Big Bang var fallet, och att vi, i och med att det finns relativt konkreta, i alla fall. Det är också lite fräckt att vi är en del av universum, allting finns i oss och vi finns i allt, vi är stjärnstoff. Alla stjärnor vi ser är uppbyggda av samma beståndsdelar.

Lärare: Blir ni inte rädda? "vad fasen, vad är lilla jag i det här"?

Elev 3: Men känner man sig verkligen liten? När man har, om man kollar upp mot himlen och tänker att allt det här finns i mig och jag finns i allt...

Lärare: Ja, i och för sig. Då blir man stor. Jag finns.

Elev 3: Jag känner mig stor när jag kollar upp mot himlen.

When the student says "I'd love to believe in something" the teacher refers to the Pentecostal pastor whom the class met the previous week on a study visit and says that longing to believe can be considered evidence of the existence of God. Five minutes earlier these male students had described themselves as atheists, but nevertheless formulate statements that could be described as

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

pantheistic and spiritual: “It's also a bit cool that we are part of the universe, everything is in us and we are in everything, we are stardust”. This is consistent with the terminology used by Lapierre's (1994), who argues that one aspect of modern spirituality is “wonderment and amazement of life and creation”. It is also interesting to note how the spiritual discourse affects the teacher's position. Instead of “being the teacher with a capital T” who examines the students on their knowledge and claims authority through his position as teacher, someone who is traditionally associated with possession of knowledge and truth, this teacher now primarily becomes a fellow human being who is also struggling with “the big questions”. In this conversation the teacher gives the impression that he perceives the existential questions to be almost frightening and distressing “Are you not afraid? ‘What the heck? what am I – little me –, in all this?’” This can also be seen as a biased and tendentious position. The students articulate another pantheistic view and instead describe themselves as a part of everything “all this is in me and I am in everything”. This gives them a feeling of existential security. Noticeable is also that the teacher in the conversation withdraws from his statements and follows the students' way of thinking.

That life questions were part of instruction and that the students were encouraged to formulate their own worldview/interpretation of life partly challenged or rather nuanced the secularist discourse, as this meant a possibility for different approaches and less overconfident answers. Occasionally there was in the classroom talk about a spiritual dimension as a possible position in a less judgmental way – that some have it and some do not. Embracing a spiritual dimension as part of a personal worldview was something that one could do, more or less, which makes it consistent with individualistic thinking, and not associated with “box-religions” that had negative connotations. To say that there is something that is holy to me, made it possible to position oneself as a believer of something (maybe not religious) and this did not exclude a spiritual dimension.

What is a human being?

On numerous occasions the discussion in different classrooms turned to why religion exists at all and it was held that “Humankind” is meaning-seeking by nature, wants to understand how everything is connected, and sees patterns.

The human being as a meaning-seeker

When the spiritual discourse was in play “we” widened to include all people on earth, not just “we, the secularized” or “we, who are part of modern society” etc., which were common articulations in the secularist discourse. Through using the word “Humankind” – in Swedish, this is preceded by the definite article and in the singular [Swedish: *människan*] – universalist claims were made. Certain existential premises were articulated as relevant and crucial to all human beings on earth and questions that every human must come to terms with. These questions are hallmarks of human existence:

Teacher: Why do people believe? Already in the ancient Lascaux caves in southern France, one can see in the carvings that are thousands of years old that they had ideas about the future, life and death, happiness and things like that.

Student: But, then, man has like always believed. For many it has been a way of dealing with death and the difficulties in life. Yes, and... People need something bigger than themselves in order to feel secure.

Teacher: Can't we just choose to ignore such things, pack them in a box and send them off and not bother to even think about them? The meaning of life and death, what is this nonsense? Can't we just consume and be happy?

Student: I think that in difficult times, people have always searched, to believe that things will, it will be better, that there is something waiting around the corner.

Excerpt 56 (audio-file 4 October 2011).

Lärare: Varför tror folk? Redan i de gamla Lascaux-grottorna i södra Frankrike kan man se på ristningar som är tusentals år gamla att man hade föreställningar om framtiden, livet och döden, lycka och såna saker.

Elev: Nej men alltså, människan har ju alltid trott typ. För många har det varit ett sätt att hantera döden och svårigheter i livet. Ja, liksom... Människan behöver något som är större än sig själv för att känna trygghet.

Lärare: Kan vi inte välja att bara strunta i sånt, packa ner dem i en låda och skicka iväg dom och strunta i att ens tänka på dem? Livets mening och döden, vad är det för bjäbb? Kan vi inte bara konsumera och vara glada?

Elev: Jag tror att i svåra tider så har människan alltid sökt, för att tro att det kommer att det kommer att bli bättre, att det väntar nånting runt hörnet.

In this conversation the quest for meaning was attributed as characteristic for the human species. That “Humankind” must inevitably reflect and respond to questions about a reason for existence, ultimate meaning, and how to relate to the uttermost existence, was presented as fact. It was thus articulated that

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

people have always wondered about the future, life, death and happiness. In the excerpt above the secularist discourse is subordinated to articulations like “people need something bigger than themselves in order to feel safe”. However, it is important to note that this only occurred when speaking about religion in general terms, not when speaking about a specific religion or institutionalized tradition. Religion and the need for answers to existential questions were talked about from an outsider’s perspective. In one respect this can be seen as part of a spiritual discourse, but at the same time the reasoning is constructed at the onset of a secularist discourse, since the argumentation is based on rational arguments about human needs – humankind is at the centre, not any spiritual or supra-empirical reality. Religion could in this context be described as something genuinely human and as something that has always existed.

The students in the following excerpt follow the same line of reasoning but added that faith can provide answers to existential questions:

Student 1: I think faith exists because we want to explain the inexplicable. Humans are curious by nature and like to explain things.

Student 2: People do not want to leave the big questions to mere chance, we want answers.

Student 3: Faith can provide security. If you find an answer in religion, you avoid worrying.

Elev 1: Jag tänker att tro finns för att vi vill förklara det oförklarliga. Människan är nyfiken till sin natur och vill förklara saker.

Elev 2: Människor vill inte lämna de stora frågorna åt slumpen, vi vill ha svar.

Elev 3: Tro kan ge trygghet. Om man hittar ett svar i religionen så slipper man bekymra sig.

Excerpt 57 (audio-file 11 October 2011).

This excerpt refers to the meaning of life – people need to feel meaning and people have throughout history turned to religion to find this meaning.⁸² In the classroom practice humans were described as meaning seekers and as creatures who have the ability to create meaning through personal life-interpretations. This interpretation of life does not have to (but might) be religious. In this, the tradition of Jeffner (1973) and Bråkenhielm (2001) in which all humans are inevitably seen as having a (more or less consciously articulated) worldview, was prominent. By referring to human beings in general, “humans are curious”, “people don’t want to leave the big questions...” instead of, for example, position themselves as the subject by using the pronoun I as in: “I am curious” “I don’t want to leave the big questions”, “I want answers”, an outsider’s

⁸² Cf. Weber (1965 [1939]) who discusses modernity and that the marginalization of religions might create a problem of meaning.

perspective was enforced. However, the pursuit of meaning and the experience of being part of something bigger were repeatedly articulated. In using expressions with universalist connotations, the legitimacy for claims of humankind as meaning seeker was made. These claims were also made through references to scientific research.

In the following excerpt the teacher read aloud to the class from an article; she also returned to the reasoning in the article several times and referenced it in various discussions:

“Research shows that to feel good people need to have a sense of hope and belonging and we need to have some kind of interpretation of existence. It need not be a religious interpretation of existence. [...] Humans are the only species who seek meaning, who cannot help doing that. This is related to our having the ability to perceive time. Animals are not able to dwell on yesterday or worry about tomorrow. Our brain is designed to look for patterns and meaning. Throughout history, it has helped us to survive. But our search for connections doesn't confine itself to the present. Our awareness of time allows us to think ahead and understand that we can make a difference. The existential problem is a major part of our stress. We find it very difficult to relax and just live in the moment, because of this ability to pursue long-term goals”.

“Forskning visar att människor för att må bra behöver känna mening hopp och samhörighet och att vi behöver ha någon form av tolkning av tillvaron. Det behöver inte alls vara en religiös tolkning av tillvaron. [...] Människan är den enda art som söker mening, som inte kan låta bli att göra det. Det hänger ihop med att vi har tidsperspektiv. Djur förmår inte grubbla på gårdagen, eller oroa sig för morgondagen. Vår hjärna är skapad för att söka efter mönster och en mening. Genom historien har det hjälpt oss att överleva. Men vårt sökande efter samband stannar inte i nuet. Tidsmedvetandet gör att vi kan tänka framåt och förstå att vi kan åstadkomma en förändring. Den existentiella problematiken är en rätt stor del av vår stress. Vi har väldigt svårt att slappna av och bara leva i nuet, på grund av den här förmågan att sträva efter långsiktiga mål”.

Excerpt 58 (Reading aloud in the classroom 27 September 2011. Article written by Anderch, Katarina, *Göteborgs Posten* 22 May 2011).

Again the human being was articulated as meaning seeker, which opened up for religious/spiritual positions and interpretations. Still, this articulation gave a scientific biological explanation for the human quest for meaning. The human species has, contrary to other species, the ability to perceive different perspectives on history and time, and through this reflect on life. The quest for meaning had thus been an evolutionary advantage. In this sense, spirituality and religion were also compatible with a secularist way of understanding life.

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

The human being as comprising a soul

Do humans have a soul? And in that case, what does that mean? In a classroom-discussion presented in the previous chapter (excerpt 21) where the teacher outlined a biological view of humankind, and contrasted it with a religious view of human life, the discussion also addressed whether human beings have souls or not, where the soul is located and what implications this has for how to perceive human life. This was a class of technology students who studied science, and the discussion wound up shifting between these two perspectives – that on the one hand humans can be described and understood in terms of neurotransmitters, serotonin and dopamine levels and chemical reactions or the perspective that there is something more than the material world. Some students leaned towards a more strictly biological view of man, while others were less sure of what they thought and argued that a biological and scientific view of man didn't necessarily rule out the notion that human beings have a soul:

Student 1: Can you have both a religious and a biological view of humankind?

Teacher: Yes, that you can.

Student 1: Yes, one can, I think we are made of matter, or like ... but I think we have a soul.
[...]

Teacher: You said that we are made of matter?

Student 1: Yes, you're not made of nothing, right? But you can still have a soul. That we don't know.

Elev 1: Kan man ha både en religiös och en biologisk människosyn?

Lärare: Ja, det kan man ha.

Elev 1: Ja, man kan ju ha, jag tror att vi är uppbyggda av materia, eller liksom... men jag tror nog att vi har en själ.
[...]

Lärare: Du sa att vi är uppbyggda av materia?

Elev 1: Ja, man är väl inte uppbyggd av ingenting, eller? Men man kan ju fortfarande ha en själ. Det vet vi ju inte.

Excerpt 59 (audio-file 7 December 2011).

This type of more tentative conversation, where the teacher presented different positions, and on several occasions pointed out that there are also differences of opinion *within* the different paradigms, opened up for the possibility to positions both inside and outside the secularist discourse. When talking about religion, spirituality and related matters, the detached outsider position was by far the most common. In the excerpt above though, the student posed her question from an inside perspective. She reflected on what she herself thought about these issues. She also challenged the teacher's somewhat dualistic outline of different views of humankind. In the classroom discussion the teacher

returned to the student and showed through his question that he was interested in how and what she thought.

Whether humans have a soul or not was addressed compiled with articulations about humanity, free will and the responsibility human beings have for their fellow beings. The idea that humankind is characterized by having a soul (in contrast to other species) was occasionally articulated as a somewhat religious idea, and a consequence of the notion that human dignity derives from human beings having been created in the image of God. In the following excerpt the teacher wants the students to discuss *why* humans are considered to have a certain value just because they are humans:

Teacher: How can we argue that everyone has the same human value?

Student 1: Religions argue for all human beings' unique value based on religion, that a human being's value is derived from God. If everybody is descended from Adam and Eve then we have the same value.

Teacher: Yes, the idea that all human beings have value has its roots in Judaism, Christianity, and partly in Islam, in the West. There is a higher power that gave some kind of validity and strength to the argument. A human being is unique and special. But we will never be able to find proof that this is exactly why. Rather, this is a kind of belief or value that one can argue for more or less wisely, right?

Student 2: My thoughts are based on the idea that this can be about our ability to reason.

Student 3: Yes, it's all about intelligence.

Teacher: Well, you can think that it is about our special ability, that we humans wherever we live in the world have reason, an ability to think clearly, insightfully, see the consequences of various courses of action, for example. To think rationally. And then, one may ask whether this is what distinguishes us from all other creatures? Can a...dog think rationally?

(Giggles in class.)

Teacher: I'm no expert, but really, we do not know enough to be able to define this so easily. What distinguishes a highly talented chimp from a man? It might well have something close to human dignity soon? And

Lärare: Hur kan vi argumentera för att alla har samma människovärde?

Elev 1: Religioner argumenterar för människans unika värde utifrån religion, att människan fått sitt värde av Gud. Om alla härstammar från Adam och Eva så är det ju samma värde.

Lärare: Ja, människovärdestanken har ju sina rötter i judendom kristendom och delvis i islam i västvärlden. Det är en högre makt som har gett någon form av giltighet och styrka i argumentationen. Människan är unik och speciell. Men några bevis kommer vi aldrig att kunna hitta, att det är just därför. Utan det här är en slags övertygelse eller värdering man kan argumentera för mer eller mindre klokt för, va?

Elev 2: Jag tänker utifrån den tanken att det kan handla om att vi har ett förnuft

Elev 3: Ja, det handlar ju om intelligens

Lärare: Ja, man kan tänka att det handlar om att vi besitter en speciell förmåga, vi människor, oavsett var vi bor i världen så har vi ett förnuft, en förmåga att tänka klart, insiktsfullt, se konsekvenser av olika handlingsalternativ till exempel. Tänka rationellt. Och då kan man fråga sig om det är det som skiljer oss från alla andra varelser? Kan en ... hund tänka rationellt? *(Fniss i klassen.)*

Lärare: Jag är ingen expert, men egentligen så vet man inte tillräckligt för att kunna definiera det rakt upp och ner. Vad skiljer en högt begåvad schimpans från en människa? Den tangerar väl nästan människovärdet snart? Och därmed få sina mänskliga

6. "WE ARE STARDUST..." - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

thus have their human rights respected? An extremely controversial position is the people who may have some form of developmental disability, such as Downs's syndrome. Who are human, but think differently. Should they be downgraded then? "Yes, they're not real people. We will pause for you here". It's important to know how to argue here. What do you think about this concept that has more to do with religion, that we have a soul? A spiritual core? Some inner part that is unique, something spiritual. Is that what gives us a value? Or are we just atoms? What do you think?

rättigheter respekterade? En oerhört kontroversiell ståndpunkt är ju personer som har någon form av, kanske har någon form av utvecklingsstörning, t.ex. Downs syndrom. Som är människor, men tänker på ett annat sätt. Ska dom nedgraderas då? "Ja dom är ju inte riktig människor. Vi pausar på dig här". Det gäller att veta hur man argumenterar här. Vad tror ni om det här begreppet som har mer med religion att göra, att vi har en själ? En andlig kärna? Nån inre del som är unik, något själsligt. Är det det som gör att vi har ett värde? Eller är vi bara atomer? Vad tänker ni?

Excerpt 60 (audio-file 18 October 2011).

The teacher asked the students what it is that gives humans a special value compared to other species, but the students were a bit reluctant or hesitant to adopt the teacher's reasoning and it cannot be determined by their response how they viewed a possible human soul. In this lesson the teacher connects human dignity with the concept of soul, which is an old notion in the Western history of ideas ever since antiquity: Is the soul material? Does human worth lie in the soul? Have atoms no value? (cf. Joas, 2013). By using words such as "core" or "just atoms" the teacher positions himself in relation to different discourses. On the whole, the discussion constantly shifted between different discourses: On the one hand, one of the students brought up the notion that religions argue that human beings have a unique value because they are created in the image of God and the teacher asked if human beings get their unique value because they have a soul, "a spiritual core". On the other hand, other students lifted up the idea that human dignity is associated with reason and intelligence, which the teacher then tried to problematize by juxtaposing a talented chimpanzee with a mentally disabled man. In this discussion, the teacher attempted through his questions to demonstrate the limitations of argument and challenge beliefs that the students had taken for granted.

Are humans equal to their souls? In that case, where is the soul seated? What is reason in relation to soul? Many times, in different classes, it was obvious that many students had not thought much about these issues and various assumptions collided:

Student 1: You have not your brain left [when you die], it's just your soul!

Student 2: But my soul is my brain! Right?

Elev 1: Du har ju inte kvar din hjärna [när du dör], det är bara din själ!

Elev 2: Men min själ är ju min hjärna! Eller?

Several of the students: No
Student 2: What is a soul then?
Student 3: Yes, what is a soul?
Student 1: A soul is like, a soul
Student 4: Consciousness
Student 1: Consciousness is when you're thinking.
Student 2: No
Student 1: Of course it is
Student 3: What is a soul?
Student 4: It's you!
Student 3: I do not know what a soul is
Student 2: I don't believe in the soul
Student 1: Me neither. But I do not know what it is to begin with. I thought that was you were thinking with, the soul.
Student 4: The inner essence...

Flera av eleverna: Nej
Elev 2: Vad är en själ då?
Elev 3: Ja, vad är en själ?
Elev 1: En själ är själ liksom
Elev 4: Medvetandet
Elev 1: Medvetandet är ju när man tänker.
Elev 2: Nej
Elev 1: Det är klart det är
Elev 3: Vad är en själ?
Elev 4: Det är ju du!
Elev 3: Jag vet inte vad en själ är
Elev 2: Jag tror inte på själ
Elev 1: Inte jag heller. Men jag vet inte vad det är till att börja med. Jag trodde det var det man tänkte med, själen
Elev 4: Det inre väsendet...

Excerpt 61 (audio-file 21 October 2011).

As in the previous excerpt, the discussion oscillated between different discourses. To some students the existence of the soul was natural, but some declared that they “don't believe in the soul”.

The idea of humankind created in the image of God has evolved into the idea that all humans carry a divine essence, and the immortal soul has played a critical role in the way people perceived themselves and their place in life. Joas (2013) argues that the concept of the soul began to be seen as problematic by empiricists and materialists in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, instead of completely abandoning the idea of human beings comprising a soul, under the influence of psychology, pragmatism, ideas about human intersubjectivity, and theories of the social construction of the individual, a shift has taken place. Notions of the soul were abandoned in favour of notions of the self, from soul to self, from cosmology to psychology. When the students discussed the concept of the soul, we see examples of both these perceptions of soul and self.

Concepts with religious roots

In RE there is a strong tradition of teaching about particular facts in the religious traditions such as the five pillars, the Eightfold Path, facts about Jesus and Mohammed's life and so on. The teachers felt that a large group of the students lacked knowledge of these facts, which was why they devoted a good deal of classroom time to teaching them. This section will focus on the

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

concepts of holiness, sin, and forgiveness, where the first was related to a general religious dimension and the latter to the Christian religious tradition.

Holiness

The adjectives “holy” or “sacred” [Swedish: *helig*] stood for a concept that students clearly associated with religion but also a concept several students found difficult to relate to.⁸³ In one classroom where the concept of holiness was discussed several students described their personal close relationships as sacred or holy:

Teacher: But let's go on. The concept of holiness. It can be a rather vague concept, but it is among the most important concepts. What does that mean?

Student 1: Inviolable

Student 2: I think it's a tricky word. I think of Aladdin's lamp, it shines so

Teacher: From the Disney movie? Yes ... More descriptions of the concept?

Student 3: Invaluable, close to God. Might be different depending upon the way different people inside or outside religions perceive it.

Teacher: If you were to go to yourself - how do you use the word, what does it mean to you?

Student 4: No, I do not think that word should exist. It means nothing.

Student 1: It's an adjective to describe something indescribable, so of course it is a difficult word. But you must surely be able to talk about things, and then we have to have words.

Student 3: For religious people it means something, and that we ought to respect.

Student 2: But it need not only be that. If, for example, someone has been working for a month and after 30 days, gets to lie in,, then it is holy.

Lärare: Men vi går vidare. Begreppet helig. Det kan vara ett ganska diffust begrepp, men det är bland de viktigaste begreppen. Vad innebär det?

Elev 1: Okränkbar

Elev 2: Jag tycker det är ett knepigt ord. Jag tänker på Aladdins lampa, att den lyser så

Lärare: Från disneyfilmen? Ja... Fler beskrivningar av begreppet?

Elev 3: Ovärderligt, nära till Gud. Kan vara olika för hur olika personer innanför och utanför religionerna ser på det.

Lärare: Om ni skulle gå till er själva – hur använder ni ordet, vad betyder det för er?

Elev 4: Nej, jag tycker inte att det ordet borde finnas. Det säger ingenting.

Elev 1: Det är ju ett adjektiv som beskriver något obeskrivbart, så det är klart att det är ett svårt ord. Men man måste väl ändå kunna prata om saker, och då måste vi ha ord.

Elev 3: För religiösa människor betyder det något, och det måste vi ju respektera.

Elev 2: Men det behöver ju inte bara vara så. Om man t.ex. har arbetat i en månad och efter 30 dagar får sin fösta sovmorgon, då är ju den helig.

Lärare: Det är ju ett religiöst begrepp som syftar på något okränkbart, något särskilt

⁸³ One of the teachers chose to organize a larger section of class time based on the concepts of faith, holiness, ethics and morality, myth, ritual and views of humanity. He designed the lessons so that students received a booklet with facts from the encyclopaedia about the concepts, but also poems, short fiction and song lyrics. The examination consisted of discussion of the concepts in small groups of 6-10 students. The concepts were, however, not related to how they can be perceived in different religious traditions (cf. Smart, 1977), but were in principle discussed based on how the student saw these concepts.

Teacher: It's a religious term that refers to something inviolable, something especially important and lofty for anyone. Is something inviolable for you, something especially important?

Student 4: I still don't like the word. But I have stuff from relatives who are dead. And they are precious to me, they mean a lot, I can like remember them.

Teacher: And if anyone were to criticize them or say that they are useless would you be upset?

Student 4: Mm...

Student 1: Relations, it is sacred to me, some relationships I have. No one may talk shit about them.

Teacher: Is it the relation itself or the person who is holy?

Student 1: The relationship I think, that I have this special relationship with them.

Student 5: Old objects, things that have been passed down in the family. Maybe it is not holy, it is a too strong word. But respect, you don't want to destroy these things.

Student 3: Maybe life itself. Not to take someone's life, it isn't something you can get back.

Student 5: A place can be sacred. At our summer house there is a hayloft, which is a very special place to me. That's where Grandpa sat and read to us. It was also where the maids and the workmen used to pray. That makes the place like sacred to me. I would never do anything to change it or anything.

Teacher: A sacred place. It's very common for people to create their own holy places, in the woods or on a rock or somewhere.

Student 5: Couples in love do that often, create their own rituals and places, it becomes sacred to them.

Teacher: Exactly, the wedding day becomes a marker. There can be slight differences in the reasons why something is sacred. Either you justify the holiness of a site with another reality, that God ordained it, or based on personal motives. This relativizes things, the personal is only sacred to me.

Excerpt 62 (audio-file 11 October 2011).

som är viktiga och upphöjda för någon. Är något okränkbart för er, något särskilt viktigt?

Elev 4: Jag gillar fortfarande inte ordet. Men jag har några grejer som är från släktingar som är döda. Och de är värdefulla för mig, de betyder jättemycket, jag kan minnas dem och så.

Lärare: Och om någon skulle kritisera dem eller tala om att de är värdelösa skulle du bli upprörd?

Elev 4: Mm...

Elev 1: Relationer, det är heligt för mig, några relationer jag har. Ingen får snacka skit om dem.

Lärare: Är det relationen i sig eller personen som är heliga?

Elev 1: Relationen tror jag, att jag har den här speciella relationen till dem.

Elev 5: Gamla föremål, saker som gått i arv i slakten. Det är kanske inte heligt, det är ett för starkt ord. Men respekt, man vill inte förstöra de här sakerna.

Elev 3: Kanske livet i sig. Att inte ta någons liv, det är inget man får tillbaka.

Elev 5: En plats kan vara helig. På vårt sommarställe finns en höskulle som är en väldigt speciell plats för mig. Där satt morfar och läste för oss. Det var också så att pigorna och drängarna använde den platsen för att be. Det gör också att den platsen känns som helig för mig. Jag skulle aldrig vilja göra något för att förändra den eller så.

Lärare: En sakral plats. Det är ju väldigt vanligt att folk skapar sina egna heliga platser, i skogen eller på någon klippa eller någonstans.

Elev 5: Förälskade par gör ju ofta så, skapar egna ritualer och platser, det blir heliga för dem.

Lärare: Precis, bröllopsdagen blir en markering. Det kan ju skilja lite i motiv till varför något är heligt. Antingen motiverar man att en plats ska vara helig med en annan verklighet, att Gud bestämt det, eller utifrån personliga motiv. Det relativiserar ju saker, de personliga är ju bara heliga för mig.

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

Is “holiness” a religious concept? If you do not consider yourself religious, can you still relate to the concept? Organizing teaching based on religious concepts and analysing how the concepts can be understood in different traditions are rooted in the phenomenological tradition that dominated both the study of religion and the teaching of religious education for most of the twentieth century (Jackson, 1997; Smart, 1969). The teacher in the above example describes the concept of holiness as essential to understand what religion is about.⁸⁴ Several different positions emerged in the conversation about what holiness can mean. When the teacher asked what the concept of holiness might mean he got a reply in which students tried to answer neutrally, that word means inviolate, invaluable, but also associations of something divine, “close to God”. In this situation the teacher asked what the word meant to them personally, and he got fairly different answers. One student said that it is an empty concept that does not mean anything “it should not exist”. When the concept is described as religious, the students had difficulties relating to it. Holy was associated with “them”, “the religious”, but it was nevertheless the case that everyone has to respect that religious people perceive things and places as holy. One of the students introduced a non-religious use of the word when she defined as sacred the first morning she could sleep late after a long period of work. When, at the teacher’s request, other students tried to describe something that is inviolable for them, they described stuff that evoked memories and which they associated with important events or persons, relationships, life itself and holy places. Not least holy were relations - that seemed to be something everybody could agree on and considered holy or inviolable.⁸⁵

That the discussion in the classroom involves these articulations is not unique – that relationships are perceived as sacred can partly be seen as part of

⁸⁴Cf. classical religious studies and notions of the concept of holy: Nathan Söderblom describes the distinction between sacred and profane as characteristic for all religions and he emphasizes the holy as more central in religious thinking than the idea of the divine (Söderblom, 1914). In the beginning of the twentieth century, Rudolf Otto coined the term *numinous* to explain the concept of holy. The “numinous” he defines as non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self (Otto, 2010 [1923]).

⁸⁵ It may seem like a paradox that the family and close relationships are portrayed as the main factor that gives meaning while individualism is hailed as an inviolable ideal. Unlike communities where the individual is totally dependent on relatives and friends to cope with everyday life, the state in Sweden guarantees individual freedom by expanding the welfare sector where social insurance (parents insurance exempted) is linked to the individual and not the family. Maybe it's exactly this that enables the sacralisation of personal relationships in a secular context, that it is an individual choice whether they should be considered sacred or not.

the “subjective turn” in which meaning and authority are constructed from the inside through their own subjective experience, not by reference to an external divine power (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). The discussion can also be seen against the backdrop of the secularisation process, where the divine is ascribed to the private sphere and the increasing sacralisation of the private sphere and everyday practices (Ammerman, 2013). Meanwhile, the need for holiness, something inviolable seems to remain whether related to some divine or not. But as the teacher pointed out, this relativizes what is perceived as holy and makes it a matter of personal choice. What is holy to me is maybe only holy to me and not to other people.

Sin and forgiveness

Some concepts had a clear connection to a specific religious tradition. Here the concept of sin and forgiveness will be outlined as articulated in relation to the spiritual discourse.⁸⁶ In RE-lessons where Christianity consisted of the teaching content, sin appeared as one of the most central concepts that strongly characterizes the construction of Christianity in the classroom. The articulations showed that even though many students deprecated a religious position they still had strong opinions about these concepts in a way that did not occur in relation to concepts of other religious traditions. This concerned both their own experiences and how they related to Christian practices such as baptisms, funerals, confirmations, marriages, etc., but also opinions on certain beliefs, for instance sin. The following excerpt illustrates how the concept of sin was articulated as a way of escaping responsibility:

Student 1: My parents are like super-non-Christian, like totally extreme. So I have this, it's a bit mean to say this, but I feel like, Christians, it is unintelligent. I really think that. Because I cannot relate to how you might think that you can blame everything on someone else. Yes, but like, I beat my wife, but go and confess so all sins, all sins disappear, I'm forgiven

Student 2: That I think is very difficult, forgiveness of sins is so difficult for me. That

Elev 1: Mina föräldrar är så här superokristna, så här helt extremt typ. Så jag har det här så här, det är lite taskigt att säga, men jag tycker så här, dom kristna, det är ointelligent. Jag tycker verkligen det. För jag kan inte relatera till hur man kan tro att det går att skylla allting på nån annan. Ja, typ men jag, jag slog min fru, men går och biktar mig så alla synder, alla synder försvinner, jag är förlåten

⁸⁶ Of course there were hundreds of concepts articulated in the RE-practice. I choose to highlight sin and forgiveness in relation to the spiritual discourse as they generated more articulations from an “insider”-perspective, what they might mean to a believer and thus in some sense can be seen as part of a spiritual discourse.

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

you should go and ask apologise to God instead of going and talk to the person you have hurt.

Student 1: It turns into a stereotypical life, but then it's not my fault, it is God, God's will then, it is God's will that I shot that guy

Student 2: Yes really!

Elev 2: Det har jag jättesvårt med, syndernas förlåtelse har jag så svårt för. Att man ska gå och be Gud om ursäkt istället för att gå och prata med den man har sårat.

Elev 1: Det blir stereotypt liv, men alltså det är inte mitt fel, det är Gud, Guds vilja alltså det är Guds vilja att jag sköt den killen

Elev 2: Ja verkligen!

Excerpt 63 (audio-file 13 October 2011).

In addition to an articulation of a view of sin and forgiveness, this statement contains an illustration of students largely deriving their knowledge of Christianity from movies and media. The fact that confession only occurs in the Catholic Church and not in the Church of Sweden or any other denominations of Protestantism was something of which these pupils seemed unaware of or at least didn't discuss.

Because of their students' lack of knowledge about religious concepts or key Christian terms, many of the teachers were trying to find parallels in the students' world of experience to compare with and this gave a certain slant to the way religion was brought up in the classrooms. In one classroom the teacher gave the pupils the task of discussing what sin was in the time of Jesus, five hundred years ago and what is regarded as sin today. In the classroom words like “whore”, “smoke”, “drink”, “fuck” were tossed around. “That's all that is bad, right”? The teacher said that incest and paedophilia could be regarded as sins today. He stated that for the church, sin has always been associated with sex outside of marriage and that for the Church sin is linked to punishment.

Teacher: Engaging in these kinds of things [*sin*], then you will have to take the elevator down, to hell, that is. They have used hell to scare people.

Lärare: Ägnar ni er åt det [*synd*], då får ni ta hissen ner, till helvetet alltså. De har använt helvetet för att skrämma folk.

Excerpt 64 (audio-file 20 March 2012).

The students concluded that people were more religious in the time of Jesus than today and what is regarded as sinful has varied in different times and cultures. The teacher indicated that the concept of sin is not used today. Despite this the students were asked to define what was perceived as sin today and they delivered an exposé of various “sins”. Much of what the pupils brought up as sins – stealing, adultery, etc. – may have been considered taboo or “sinful” in many cultures in different historical periods, but there was no discussion of why the pupils brought up these things or if they actually believed that something

was regarded as sin. The religious Christian definition of the concept of sin as what separates man from God was not taken up. Nor was the way other religions handle what is considered taboo or sin or the function for society of prohibiting certain deeds.

One of the teachers described Christianity with reference to the concept of sin as a negative worldview in comparison with other worldviews, religious and non-religious.

Teacher: A good example of a default attitude toward life that is negative, it's awful to say, but when you talk about these things, you have to look at the prototype, then the original. Christianity is by definition a negative view of life. And it is that way due to the attitude toward sin, especially original sin in Christianity. That each one of us actually is born sinful. We must be baptized in order to get out of there. Ergo the unborn children end up in limbo in Dante's hell, because they had not yet been baptized.

Lärare: Ett bra exempel på en negativ grundinställning till livet är, det är hemskt att säga det, men, när man pratar om såna här saker så måste man titta till prototypen, alltså till den ursprungliga. Kristendomen är per definition en negativ livsåskådning. Och det är den väldigt mycket på grund av det syndtänkande, framförallt arvsynden som finns i kristendomen. Att var och en av oss faktiskt föds syndiga. Vi måste döpas för att kunna komma därifrån. Ergo hamnar dom ofödda barnen i limbo i Dantes helvete, därför att dom hade ju inte hunnit bli döpta.

Excerpt 65 (audio-file 29 September 2011).

The teacher could conceivably have Jeffner's (1973) "basic attitude to life" in mind when she states that Christianity is a negative worldview and as such it encompasses a basically negative attitude to life. What sin or original sin could possibly be was not explained or discussed during this lesson. Note that the teacher in this quote refers to what she calls "the prototype". Though the teacher at other times expressed that she did not want to talk about religions in the way she did here, in the classroom there was no opening for anybody else to nuance or problematize the statement. That Christianity is a negative view of life appeared to be an undeniable truth. On the one hand, the utterance was strongly negative, but on the other hand she almost used an insider perspective of Christianity.

In relation to the discussions of sin, some of the teachers brought up the concept of forgiveness as a key element in Christianity. One teacher had an oral exam in smaller groups, and one of the concepts the teacher wanted the pupils to understand was sin. In the following excerpt the conversation is about sin and forgiveness:

6. "WE ARE STARDUST..." - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

Teacher: Yes. All people are sinners, right? You are sinners, right? "But I have not done anything wrong". Well, you are a sinner anyway. Just by living, you are a sinner. But how are you saved?

Student 1: Salvation. Forgiveness

Teacher: You get forgiveness. If you go to a high mass you receive the forgiveness of sins. You acknowledge that you are a sinner, but you get the forgiveness of sins. It's great! (*Insecure laughter among students. They don't know if the teacher is being sarcastic or not.*)

Teacher: But you have to accept it in your heart. You cannot, you must receive forgiveness of sins; otherwise you will not be forgiven. You need to receive Jesus. But it's a great message really! If you accept Jesus your sins are forgiven, and then you will have eternal life.

Student 2: It may be dangerous too.

Student 1: It depends on how you have sinned. If you, like, always are forgiven.

Teacher: Yes, but God sees through you. You cannot, if you take Catholicism and go to confession and ask for forgiveness, but not in your heart, then you will not after all, God does not buy that, he is not easily fooled. He sees if you are serious and ask for forgiveness. Otherwise, you are a sinner because you are trying to fool God, it's not possible to go to confession and say yes...

Student 2: In that case the priests ought not give forgiveness because God speaks through him.

Teacher: Yes, you could say so.

Student 2: Then it's the priest that is deceiving you.

Teacher: But the priest says, that IF you accept Jesus your sins are forgiven.

Student 2: But you end up in hell anyway for God sees through him.

Teacher: Yes, but he gives you the opportunity to receive God into your heart and if you do, you receive the forgiveness of sins. But if you say "Fine, now I'm here without sin" but actually, you have not, you are faking, then God sees through you, that's what Christians believe.

Excerpt 66 (audio-file 14 March 2012)

Lärare: Ja. Alla människor är syndare va. Du är syndare va. "Men jag har ju inte gjort något fel". Jo, du är syndare ändå. Bara genom att leva är du syndare. Men hur räddas du?

Elev 1: Frälst. Förlåtelse

Lärare: Du får ju förlåtelse. Om du går på en högmässa får du syndernas förlåtelse. Du erkänner att du är en syndig människa, men du får ju syndernas förlåtelse. Det är fantastiskt!

(*Osäkert skratt bland eleverna. De vet inte om läraren är ironisk eller inte.*)

Lärare: Men du måste ta emot det i ditt hjärta. Du kan inte, du måste ta emot syndernas förlåtelse, annars så blir du inte förlåten. Du måste ta emot Jesus. Men det är ju ett fantastiskt budskap egentligen! Tar du emot Jesus så får du syndernas förlåtelse, och då kommer du få evigt liv.

Elev 2: Det kan vara farligt med.

Elev 1: Det beror ju på vad man har syndat med. Om man alltid blir förlåten liksom.

Lärare: Ja, men Gud ser ju igenom dig. Du kan ju inte, om du tar katolicismen och tar bikten och ber om förlåtelse och så är det inte i hjärtat, då kommer du ju inte, Gud köper ju inte, han är ju inte lättlurad. Han ser om du menar allvar och ber om förlåtelse. Annars så är du ju en syndare att du försöker lura Gud, det går ju inte att gå in i bikten och säga ja...

Elev 2: I så fall borde ju inte prästerna ge syndernas förlåtelse för Gud talar ju genom honom.

Lärare: Ja, kan man ju säga

Elev 2: Då är det ju prästen som lurar dig

Lärare: Men prästen säger ju att OM du tar emot Jesus så får du syndernas förlåtelse

Elev 2: Men så hamnar man i helvetet ändå för att Gud ser genom han.

Lärare: Ja, men han ger dig en möjlighet att ta emot Gud i ditt hjärta och gör du det så får du syndernas förlåtelse. Men säger du att "Ja vad gött, nu är jag syndfri här" men egentligen så har du inte, det är fejk, då har Gud sett igenom det menar man inom kristendomen.

For an oral exam, the teacher talks very much himself, and the pupils' thoughts on the matter hardly come through. But the excerpt is typical from several aspects: Again sin and forgiveness are associated and exemplified with the Catholic confession. And the pupils are consistent in their view that a general policy of forgiveness of all deeds is not desirable, even dangerous. If one is forgiven, for example, after committing murder, one would most certainly murder again.

To relate to religious concepts based on understanding of the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation, the pupils were asked what forgiveness meant and what one can forgive. This teacher described very clearly how Christians, in this case Catholics, handled sins. He went through the different steps of Catholic confession: consciousness of sin, contrition, confession, absolution/forgiveness and penance:

Teacher: You could put it this way; is there forgiveness for all? Or should I just forgive, does one forgive only their own...? At this point we are actually touching on a new concept. A concept that we call mercy. But it is really God who ultimately gives mercy. Can other religions be forgiven? Here there are differing notions, so to speak, one can, so to speak reach God from other religions, here there are some differing beliefs within Catholicism. There is one called, "no salvation outside the Church", and it means that one can only become righteous if one goes through the church. Then there are others who usually are described as having more inclusive beliefs. We think that there is a divine spark in everyone so therefore everyone everywhere can reach God. With or without God, with or without the priest, so to speak. Doesn't this sound like a pretty good thing in a way?

Student 1: Lie to yourself.

Teacher: Lie to yourself.

Student 1: You can do like anything, or does he accept everything, the priest? Or yes, God then?

Teacher: Yes, in the end, it's only God who can forgive.

Student 1: Then he, yes the priest says yes, you will be forgiven by God?

Teacher: There are actually some acts in this context, I have linked to the Catholic Church's website. There are some acts that actually are

Lärare: Man skulle kunna uttrycka det så här; finns förlåtelse för alla? Eller ska jag bara förlåta, förlåter man bara sin egen...? Här kommer egentligen ett annat begrepp in. Ett begrepp som vi brukar kalla för nåd. Men det är ju egentligen Gud som i slutändan ger nåden. Kan andra religioner förlåtas? Här finns lite olika, kan man så att säga kan man så att säga nå Gud från andra religioner, här finns det lite olika riktningar inom katolicismen. De finns en som heter, ingen frälsning utanför kyrkan, och den innebär att man bara kan bli rättfärdiggjord om man går genom kyrkan. Sen finns det andra som man brukar kalla mer inkluderande riktningar. Vi tänker att det finns en gudagnista i alla så därför kan alla någonstans nå Gud. Med Gud eller ej, eller prästen eller ej så att säga. Låter inte det här som en ganska bra grej på ett sätt?

Elev 1: Ljuga för sig själv.

Lärare: Ljuga för sig själv.

Elev 1: Man kan göra vad som helst liksom, eller godkänner han allting, han prästen? Eller ja, Gud då?

Lärare: Ja i slutändan är det ju bara Gud som kan förlåta.

Elev 1: Alltså han, ja prästen säger ja, du blir förlåten av Gud?

Lärare: Det finns faktiskt några handlingar som i det här sammanhanget, jag har länkat till katolska kyrkans hemsida. Det finns några

6. "WE ARE STARDUST..." - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

in fact unforgivable. And among them are acts such as paedophilia and...

Student 2: But if we say that someone has committed a murder or something like that?

Teacher: Murder is not [*unforgivable*], murder can be forgiven.

Student 2: Yeah, but if we say that one is forgiven by God, then, one can end up in jail anyway?

Student 3: Then I can just kill someone and then I will be forgiven. So I go and kill somebody no one, and so I'm forgiven!

Teacher: But can you not actually think like this, that someone.

Student 3: But if you kill someone again and are forgiven every time!

Teacher: Okay

Student 3: Then you may go to various confessionals, there is no one that knows.

Student 1: It's like lying to yourself in that way. One believes that yes, now I'm forgiven.

Teacher: But it still requires, this consciousness of sin, repentance.

Student 1: But you know that you did something stupid, there is nothing strange about it.

Teacher: But you must have regret, you know

Student 1: But I can feel that, like, damn I did it again! But it was fun doing it. It's perhaps not often ordinary people doing that kind of stuff.

Teacher: If we take the example Breivik, who is a current topic. He cannot go to confession, for he regrets nothing.

Student 2: But he admits after all what he has done.

Student 1: But he can say that...

Student 3: Yes, all he has to do is say "I regret what I've done".

Teacher: No, it is not just a matter of saying so.

Student 2: What does one have to do then?

Student 1: A polygraph!

(General laughter in the classroom)

Student 3: You could lie to the old man in the booth, but you cannot lie to God!

handlingar som faktiskt är oförlåtliga. Och till det hör till exempel då pedofili och...

Elev 2: Men om vi säger att någon har begått ett mord eller något sånt?

Lärare: Mord är inte [*oförlåtligt*], mord kan förlåtas.

Elev 2: Ja, men om vi säger att man blir förlåten av Gud då, kan man hamna i fängelse ändå?

Elev 3: Då kan jag ju bara mörda någon och så blir jag förlåten. Så går jag och mördar nån ingen, och så blir jag förlåten!

Lärare: Men kan man inte faktiskt tänka så här att nån

Elev 3: Men om man mördar någon igen och blir förlåten varje gång!

Lärare: Okej

Elev 3: Då kan du ju gå till olika sån bikt, det är ingen som vet det.

Elev 1: Det är ju som att man ljuger för sig själv på det sättet. Man tror att ja, nu är jag förlåten.

Lärare: Men det kräver ju fortfarande det här, syndamedvetande, ånger.

Elev 1: Men man vet ju att man gjort något dumt, det är ju inget konstigt med det.

Lärare: Men du måste ha ånger vet du

Elev 1: Men det kan jag ju känna, fan att jag gjorde det igen liksom! Men det var ju roligt att göra det så. Det är ju kanske oftast inte vanliga personer som gör sånt.

Lärare: Om vi tar t.ex. Breivik, som är aktuell. Han kan ju inte gå till ett bikt-bås, för han ångrar ju ingenting.

Elev 2: Men han erkänner ju vad han har gjort

Elev 1: Men det kan han ju säga...

Elev 3: Ja, det är ju bara att säga att "jag ångrar det jag har gjort".

Lärare: Nej, det är inte bara att säga

Elev 2: Vad måste man göra då?

Elev 1: En lögn-detektor!

(Skratt i klassrummet)

Elev 3: Du kan ju ljuga för gubben i båset, men du kan ju inte ljuga för Gud!

Excerpt 67 (audio-file 15 November 2011).

Forgiveness seemed to be a concept that students related to, but it was not necessarily articulated as a religious concept, although it was brought up in teaching under that labelling. One question that the students asked was whether

forgiveness is for everyone, or just Catholics/Christians. In answering the teacher brought up different perspectives on the concept of mercy, mercy for all or only those who belong to their own religion. The students in this excerpt did not give the concept of mercy any attention, maybe because the concept was new to them. The teacher presented different Christian approaches towards other religions, for example “no mercy outside the Church” or more inclusive approaches. Do people need forgiveness? From whom? Why? The discussion oscillated between different discourses and the teacher tried to bring up the idea that human beings need forgiveness, that there is a human need to forgive and be forgiven (by other human beings? by God?). At the same time he described how the Catholic Church has seen this. But the students did not buy his argument – there is no real need for forgiveness, why is it needed? Further, it seemed that the general consensus of the class was that some things are unforgivable. Moreover, how do you know that someone is really repenting? The view that there is no forgiveness for some things – for example, murder – was expressed. This kind of uncompromising and rather tough stance when it comes to issues of crime and punishment was common in classroom discussion. As shown in the excerpt, the teacher tried to problematize and nuance: Breivik⁸⁷ can, for example, not receive forgiveness in this way of viewing sin, because he does not repent; that's the premise.

On the one hand, in this section one can see examples of attempts to take an insider perspective, “Christianity perceives this like this and like this” (apart from the fact that it is questionable whether one can speak of a religion thinking or doing anything at all). There was no explicit “they” in the discussion. But at the same time no voices were speaking in the first person from within a religious tradition: “I believe..., I think...” And again, in all these classrooms there were students who would have been able to talk from a perspective from within when it came to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

When it came to Christianity both teachers and students had many more comments on specific details about concepts compared to other religions. In

⁸⁷ On 22 July 2011, the summer before this study and this observation was conducted, the right-wing extremist Anders Bering Breivik detonated a bomb in Oslo's government district, killing eight people. He then carried out the massacre of 69 young people at the youth camp of the Norwegian Labour Party [*Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylkings*] on Utöja. He was sentenced to Norway's harshest penalty, 21 years in prison with the possibility of prolongation for five years at a time if he is considered dangerous to society, so-called “storage” [Norwegian: *forvaring*].

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

the syllabus it is stated that: “Teaching in the subject of religion should give students the opportunities to develop [...] the ability to analyse religions and outlooks on life based on different interpretations and perspectives” (Skolverket, 2011a). To do this, several of the teachers in this study stressed that the students must be able to understand and use various religious concepts. However, this is not always simple as many of the concepts are perceived as foreign or unfamiliar in a secular environment. Students with no knowledge or experience of anything religious many times found it hard to relate to some of the concepts that lacked an obvious corresponding concept outside the religious sphere. The concepts of sin or karma are examples of religious concepts that are quite irrelevant without their theological connection. Other concepts such as myth and ritual occur in both religious and non-religious contexts. Personal religious experience is not a prerequisite in non-confessional RE. Focus is, as in religious studies, on descriptions of what people belonging to different religious traditions do and say they believe and experience and the significance and meaning they attribute to that experience. What the stimuli that give rise to these experiences may consist of is not the subject of interest. Nevertheless, this aspect of both lack of knowledge as well as lack of personal experience was brought up by some of the teachers as something they had to take into consideration recount in teaching. Even if the teachers didn’t use the concept of religious literacy per se, their need to address it can be seen as an example of religious literacy being upheld as of central importance by scholars from different perspectives (Jackson, 1997, 2011; von Brömssen, 2013; Wright, 1996, 2004).

Your time on earth

Humans are mortal. We will all die. Life is short, or at least finite. These articulations were formulated as premises for human life and these articulations recurred in the RE-classrooms, leading to discussions about different perspectives on life and different views on what happens after the end of life.

Existential issues related to the purpose of being – and the fact that all humans share the existential fact that our time on earth is limited – were articulated in the classroom practice:

Teacher: Two more thoughts that are important to carry with you throughout life, are these. They are bothersome thoughts. No one has asked to be born. No one has asked to be born. We are only here, right? We're here. Mom and Dad had a little fun. And so the result is that I'm standing here right now. That isn't something I've asked for. But I'm here. I'll live my life. And I also know that I'll die. Everyone will die. Are you okay with this? Then there are questions: What happened before life? And what happens after life? That's when religion comes in. Or science perhaps in some contexts.

Excerpt 68 (audio-file 2 September 2011).

Lärare: Två tankar till, som är viktiga att ha med sig genom hela livet, det är dom här. Det är jobbiga tankar. Ingen har bett om att få bli till. Ingen har bett om att få bli till. Vi bara är här va! Vi finns här. Mamma och pappa hade lite roligt. Och så blev resultatet att jag står här just nu. Det är ingenting som jag bett om. Men jag är här. Jag ska leva mitt liv. Och jag vet också att jag ska dö. Alla ska dö. Är ni med på det? Sen finns det frågor; Vad hände före livet? Och vad händer efter livet? Då kommer religionen in. Eller vetenskapen kanske i vissa sammanhang.

The tone of this excerpt signals seriousness towards life and questions about life, and the teacher stresses their importance even though they are difficult thoughts. He brings up two premises of life which are beyond human control: that existence is not the choice of the individual and death will come to all humans sooner or later. In this context he linked these premises and related questions to religion, but also opened up for the fact that science might provide answers. When students were asked to define the concept of religion, beliefs about life after death were conveyed as a part of what students' articulations about what religion are all about. It was also articulated as an explanation for religion existing at all – people are afraid of the unknown and try to predict what will happen to them:

Student: I believe that humans have a constant need to always seek the answers to everything, to the big questions in life, how life came about and the world came into being, and what happens after death. And I believe that for certain people faith can be a tool, or a notion that you can get answers to these questions that you have. But I think that a faith can be anything from an ideology, to a religion and worldview, practically anything.

Excerpt 69 (audio-file 4 October 2011).

Elev: Jag tror att människan har ett ständigt behov av att alltid söka svar på allting, på livets stora frågor, hur livet kom till och världen kom till, och vad som händer efter döden. Och jag tror att för vissa kan tron vara ett hjälpmedel, eller en föreställning om att man kan få svar på dessa frågor som man frågar. Men jag tror att en tro kan vara alltifrån en ideologi, till en religion och livsåskådning, i stort sett vad som helst.

In the discussions it was also articulated that everyone, regardless of whether one has beliefs coined as religious or not, has some sort of idea of what happens when we die. When the baseline of discussions was existential, questions of existential conditions came to the forefront and were not linked to specific

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

religious traditions. Thus, other discourses than the secularist one were activated and it became easier to comprehend and elaborate upon different perspectives and approaches to these issues simultaneously. Or, put another way: when questions about the meaning of life and the concept of death were mentioned in this existential way, that it concerned issues of “ultimate concern”, statements of this nature were not perceived as “religious” with the negative connotations the concept of religion often had in the classrooms. When a spiritual discourse was at play, the focus was universal existential matters common to all humankind rather than religious traditions. This opened up for assuming positions that can be described as spiritual and/or existential. One need not be considered “religious” in order to embrace views on life and death:

Student 2: I think it's [*the reason why religion exists*] about fear of death, with regard to these questions. No one wants it to end, everybody WANTS it to continue. The Humanists said that when life is over it's like when a light goes out, then it's black. I think many people don't want that, that it should be so.

Teacher: Yes, fear might control...

Student 3: There is much in life that's tough, I think people believe so they have something to lean on.

Student 1: Something to turn to when times are tough. That you can be forgiven if you've done something stupid, to rely on something, to have hope.

Teacher: People believe in order to be released from guilt, and not be afraid...

Student 2: Security, that there is always something bigger than yourself.

Teacher: For some, you say, do all people need answers to these kinds of questions?

Students: Mm... (*murmur of agreement*)

Student 2: Everyone wants to get answers to questions about what happens when you die.

Student 4: But I think the question is irrelevant, we will see, it will be proven...

Student 2: I think people want to know. It's not something you sit and think about every day, but it might be interesting to sit and think about those kinds of big questions. Or if there is life in the universe.

Student 1: Or why we exist.

Excerpt 70 (audio-file 11 October 2011).

Elev 2: Jag tror att det [*anledningen till att religion finns*] handlar om rädsla för döden, om de frågorna. Ingen vill att det ska ta slut, alla VILL att det ska fortsätta. Det som Humanisterna sa, att när livet är slut så är det som att en lampa slocknar, då är det svart. Det tror jag många inte vill, att det ska vara så.

Lärare: Ja, rädsla kanske styr...

Elev 3: Mycket i livet är ju jobbigt, jag tror att folk tror för att ha något att luta sig mot.

Elev 1: Något att vända sig till när det är svårt. Att man kan få förlåtelse om man gjort dumma saker, att lita till något, att få hopp.

Lärare: Man tror för att bli befriad från skuld, och slippa vara rädd...

Elev 2: Trygghet, att det alltid finns något som är större än en själv.

Lärare: För en del säger ni, behöver alla människor svar på den här typen av frågor?

Elever: Mm... (*instämmande mummel*)

Elev 2: Alla vill väl få svar på frågor om vad som händer när man dör.

Elev 4: Men jag tycker den frågan är ointressant, det får man väl se, det visar sig väl...

Elev 2: Jag tror att folk vill veta det. Det är inte något man sitter och tänker på varje dag, men det kan vara intressant att sitta och fundera kring såna stora frågor. Eller om det finns liv i universum.

Elev 1: Eller varför vi finns.

In this excerpt religion and faith are articulated as something that provides meaning, security, consolation, forgiveness and an answer to the question about what happens after death. In this discussion it was stated that all human beings need these things, even if one of the students was opposed and found these questions irrelevant.

Two concepts were present in all classrooms: linear and circular views of time. In some classrooms, it was articulated as a simple fact that different religions have different perceptions of time. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a linear view of history and human life – there was a creation moment when God created the earth, then history has unfolded as a long series of events and at the end, or Judgment Day the earth will perish in one way or another. Even human life on earth is described in these traditions as linear – we are born, we live, we die, and after death there is some form of continued existence. An atheistic view of life was also described as linear in terms of birth and death, but excluding any form of continuation. The linear view was contrasted with the circular perspective in Hinduism and Buddhism where both the universe and the human soul are reborn in an endless cycle, even if the goal is to avoid reincarnation. Occasionally this information led to discussions about how the students themselves viewed time and life:

Student 1: It is a cycle

Teacher: Yes, it's a cycle. Some parts are still, that you will not escape anything really, all people are connected in various ways. Yes. What's your own, where do you end up in this? Deeds and time we have talked about. How should one look at time? Can it be like this? The cyclical? Or we can see life as a journey from birth to death?

Student 2: One can only guess beforehand, you never know what happens afterwards

Student 3: There's nothing that's been proven, you don't know what happens. So you have to live according what you think right now. And then, if there were talk of reincarnation, then you have to redo everything.

Teacher: Yes, this works of course even if you do not believe in either Buddhism or Hinduism or Christianity or Islam or Judaism, so you can still have an idea of time as cyclical, going around like this, or linear, that we are born and so we die. Period.

Elev 1: Det är ett kretslopp

Lärare: Ja, det är ett kretslopp. Några delar är ändå, att man inte kommer undan någonting egentligen, alla människor är länkade på olika sätt. Ja. Vad är eran egen, var hamnar ni i detta? Gärningar och tid har vi pratat om. Vilket sätt att se på tid ska man ha? Kan man ha det här? Det cykliska? Eller kan vi se på livet som en resa från födelse till död?

Elev 2: Man kan ju bara gissa innan, man vet ju inte vad som händer sen

Elev 3: Det är ju ingenting som är bevisat, man vet inte vad som händer. Så man får ju leva efter det man tycker just nu. Och sen, om det skulle bli tal om reinkarnation, då får man göra om allting.

Lärare: Ja, det går ju även om ni inte tror på varken buddhismen eller hinduismen, eller kristendomen eller islam eller judendom, så kan ni ändå ha en uppfattning om tiden är cyklisk, går runt så här, eller linjär, att vi föds och så dör vi. Punkt.

6. "WE ARE STARDUST..." - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

Student 1: Cyclical!

Teacher: Cyclical? What are you thinking?

Student 1: No, but... if you do something that you really regret in life so, maybe you can do it again, I do something.

Student 2: The problem is that you do not know what you've done, because you won't remember what it is...

Student 1: That you don't know, perhaps it is there like subconsciously, it might turn out...

Teacher: What you do still influences others.

Student 3: Yes, but it is the act. If I do something, in ten years it might have affected me, so yeah but, it is important to think about ... But like karma, I think is a little more than just thinking about receiving faith as a gift [referring to an earlier discussion of Luther's views on faith]. Karma I can influence myself. There it is more control of my own life, so to say.

Elev 1: Cyklisk!

Lärare: Cyklisk? Hur tänker du?

Elev 1: Nej, men... om man gör nånting som man verkligen ångrar i livet så, så kanske man får göra om det, jag gör nånting.

Elev 2: Problemet är att du inte vet vad du gjort, för du kommer inte ihåg hur det är...

Elev 1: Det vet man inte, det kanske kommer undermedvetet liksom, det kanske visar sig...

Lärare: Vad ni gör påverkar ändå andra.

Elev 3: Jo, men det är handlingen. Om jag gör nånting, så om tio år kanske det har påverkat mig, så att jo men, det är viktigt att tänka på... Men som karma tycker jag är lite mer, än att bara tänka på att man får tron som en gåva [refererar till en tidigare diskussion om Luthers syn på tro]. Karma kan jag ju påverka själv. Där är det ju större kontroll över mitt eget liv, om man säger så.

Excerpt 71 (audio-file 30 November 2011).

The teacher presented different perspectives on time, which are rooted in different religious traditions, and he said that one can embrace these perspectives regardless of whether one sees oneself as part of a specific tradition. The Karma doctrine was seen as fair and as something I, as an individual, could control. Even some of the students who clearly declared themselves atheists could in this type of classroom discussion express that they somehow expected a life after death, even if they did not see themselves as believers:

Student: After all, you think in that way, that all the dead are in heaven somehow. You've got that within you.

Elev: Man tänker ju ändå så, att alla döda är i himmelen på nåt sätt. Man har ju det inom sig.

Excerpt 72 (audio-file 2 December 2011).

This was articulated in a discussion of religious and non-religious versions of ceremonies such as baptism/child dedication ceremonies, confirmation/humanist confirmation, marriage and burial. Many of the students expressed the view that they did not want a religious ceremony, because they did not believe in the religious content. Others were stressing the importance of tradition, where religion was one part. And in this context, the discussion led to whether there might be any continuation of life after death. In the classrooms students articulated beliefs in something, that life continues in

some way. These articulations confirm the thesis of Margry (2012) who maintains this “something-ism” as the main religion in northern Europe. Another student wrote in an essay that she could imagine life as something continuous:

Energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed. Maybe we're also some kind of energy that is just converted. But in that case there must be some kind of balance, so that there is just enough of everything, or however you want to express it. In that case, the balance has been very much disturbed, given that the world is becoming overpopulated. But I can certainly imagine that life is something continuous.

Energi kan inte skapas eller förintas, bara omvandlas. Vi kanske också är någon slags energi som också bara omvandlas. Men i så fall måste det finnas någon slags balans, så att det finns lagom mycket av allt, eller hur man ska uttrycka det. Den balansen har i så fall blivit väldigt rubbad, med tanke på att världen håller på att bli överbefolkad. Men jag kan absolut tänka mig att liv är något kontinuerligt.

Excerpt 73 (From a student essay).

In this excerpt the student, who was taking the Technology Programme, quoted the law of conservation of energy, which is the first law of thermodynamics. She also applied this principle to human existence and was not averse to the idea that “life is something continuous”. Energy, positive or negative, as something permeating the universe and humans, is a central theme of holistic environments. This articulation can be seen at the backdrop to ideas where proponents of a holistic perspective maintain that there is no contradiction between metaphysics and theoretical physics. In the context of New Age modern physics is seen as supporting ancient religious ideas and ideas related to energies, for example that all matter consists of vibrating energy. Despite or due to using rational scientific language the student can position herself as scientific, rational and spiritual.

Many students seemed unaccustomed to speaking of life's border areas however, when for example death and related themes became the subject of conversation, a spiritual discourse was activated rather than a secularist one, and students articulated beliefs of some form of continuation of life after death. Questions of this existential character also have a long tradition within the Swedish RE-subject. In the 1962 curriculum it says for example: “Through facts that are dealt with within the subject, issues related to pupils’ own attitudes of life are actualized. Norms and ideals of life, which are relevant to their [the students] personal growth and foster the pursuit of truth and seriousness in life, can thereby be transferred” (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1962, p. 221, own translation).

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

Implications and concluding remarks

Spirituality is a concept, just like religion, that does not have an obvious definition either in the empirical material of this thesis or in literature concerning the matter. The definitions found in the literature have arisen in the wake of debates about modernity and religion's role and function in the modern secularized society. Weber argued that modernity implies a disenchantment with the world. Through rationality, science, and control of nature, humanity has lost a magical, spiritual dimension. This also implies the loss of a dimension that contributes to the creation of meaning in our lives (Weber, 1965 [1930]). Another way to put it using terminology borrowed from Weber is not to call it the new visibility of religion but rather a re-enchantment of the world where spirituality, personal inner experience and conscious presence are at the centre. Among people active in the institutionalized religions a relatively large group does not mind describing themselves as both religious and spiritual, whereas individuals active in alternative religious movements are reluctant to describe themselves as religious but feel more comfortable with defining themselves as spiritual or as seekers (Berghuijs, Pieper, & Bakker, 2013; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Schlehofer et al., 2008).

In the classrooms the secularist discourse was challenged or nuanced and problematized by articulations phrased as questions about the human quest for meaning throughout history and that humankind still has this need for meaning and to see one's own life in a larger context. In addition, it was acknowledged that many people have a worldview, a philosophy of life, which may not necessarily be religious, but that might include a spiritual dimension. The spiritual discourse was built up through the articulation cluster of *A spiritual dimension, A personal interpretation of life, What is a Human Being? Concepts with religious roots* and *Your time on earth*. When the spiritual discourse was in play it left the door open for things related to “something bigger”, which was articulated as what picks up where science cannot provide answers and touched upon questions concerning for example life after death or the meaning of life. This was referred to as a “spiritual dimension of existence”. This way of talking about spirituality had an individualistic character, which facilitated the reconciling of the spiritual and secular discourses. Spirituality had in this context positive connotations, such as “something bigger”, love, strength, hope, balance, and harmony, which made it easier to say that you believe in something spiritual compared to deities associated with traditional religions. Questions about

conditions of human existence were articulated in the classroom as universal existential human issues or as the spiritual dimension of humankind. In other words, no direct references to New Age or the holistic environment were made, but in the classroom perceptions about the sacred, of contact with something greater, a divine power, being true to oneself, etc. were articulated. In talking about the fact that all people must formulate their own worldview and interpretation of life it was also mentioned that a worldview might include a spiritual dimension. The way this was articulated meant that it became possible to take positions outside the secularist discourse without being perceived as unintelligent or irrational. Spirituality became a floating signifier since it was loaded with different meanings and thus was given different meanings in different discourses.

How does the life-question approach affect the discourses about religion in the classroom? By starting with existential questions and a personal interpretation of life it became possible to put the individual interpretation and approach to the different religious and non-religious traditions at the centre. One could imagine that this would open up for other discourses than the secularist discourse since it has a pluralist tone from the outset. However, an interesting finding in this study is that the secularist discourse in the classroom where they worked with Sacred Spaces was totally hegemonic and highly critical of religion. It was therefore surprising to find that in the written assignment in which students articulated how they perceived the fourth spiritual dimension (presented above) as a part of their philosophy of life that 17 of 22 of the students responded that they believe in God, believe in a divine power, believe in spirituality, believe in a God or something beyond all measure, believe in a force from which we derive strength through the days, not a belief in a defined God, but in a higher power, the spirits and energies of God as something that is there for all people, etc.

A secular approach in its literal sense does not rule out (also depending on the definition of religion, for discussions of this topic see for example Hellman, 2011; Maclure & Taylor, 2011; Saler, 2000) a religious dimension in a personal worldview. But the way the secularist discourse was articulated in the classroom it often included articulations of hostility towards religious expression that was not perceived as strictly private – according to the logic of the secularist discourse, religion is perceived as a private matter and should not be shared with others in the public space. The spiritual discourse was triggered when the teachers and students were trying to understand what religious

6. “WE ARE STARDUST...” - A SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

phenomena possibly could mean for different people of faith, and when the students in various ways were encouraged to consider what they themselves believed. When it became apparent that almost everybody in some way or another held beliefs, religious or non-religious, about life after death or the origin of the universe etc., the degree of tolerance for different opinions became higher. When teaching one-sidedly focused on the history of religions or external facts about religions such as the sacraments of Christianity, pillars of Islam, or Hinduism's god-pantheon it seems that the secularist discourse was activated to a much greater extent. When the spiritual discourse was at play, it meant that religious interpretations of life became one of several possible interpretations of life and one of several options for meaning.

7. “In Sweden we are Christian” - A Swedishness discourse

The previous chapters have shown how articulations of a secularist way of relating to religion dominated the utterances about religion and Christianity in the classrooms, but also how the secularist discourse was challenged by a spiritual discourse. However, the concepts Christian and Christianity were signs that were occasionally given another meaning. Even if Sweden was articulated as a secular country, it could also, during the very same lesson, be stated that Sweden is a Christian country. This chapter, with the subtitle “A Swedishness discourse”, involves articulations about how, who and what “we” are or, just as important, how, who and what “we” are not. These articulations are labelled a Swedishness discourse. The Swedishness discourse is distinguished by notions of national characteristics. In line with Anderson's (2006) definition, the nation in this study is seen as an imagined community.⁸⁸ Perceptions of the nation thus have a bonding but also a differential function and the chapter will highlight articulations of imaginaries of Sweden and the Swedish. When the Swedishness discourse was at play, the position as Christian, being part of Swedishness became a possible position. The self-image of Sweden articulated in the classrooms included notions of Sweden as a Western European country where tolerance and individualism were central themes. An important element in the construction of the nation and the Swedish was to define the boundaries of what is considered Swedish and thus what is articulated as “un-Swedish”. Articulations with a strong repudiation against “them”, which included religions in general (and may also include Christians), Islam and Muslims in particular, also contributed to the construction of this discourse.

The Swedishness discourse was built up through descriptions of what is Swedish and hence what is not Swedish and articulated as un-Swedish through clusters of articulations of *Sweden as a Christian country*, *Alienation and threat*, *“We*

⁸⁸ Anderson's (2006) widespread definition of the nation as an imagined community reads: “It [the nation] is an imagined political community as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

have Santa Claus” – holidays, religion and culture, “In Sweden we are secular, individualistic and tolerant” and “Like worshipping Mickey Mouse”: Othering of the religious.

Sweden – a Christian country

Occasionally a national discourse was prevalent in the classroom practice. When this discourse was at play students and teachers articulated Sweden as a Christian country, and a collective national “we” associated Christianity to a national cultural heritage. In some respects, these notions challenged the secularist discourse. However, a striking feature was that associations of Swedishness as related to Christianity consisted of partly contradictory articulations.

In the classroom, Sweden was frequently referred to as “a Christian country” and this was often presented as an accepted and unquestioned truth.⁸⁹ Against the backdrop of the Swedish national history, articulations in the non-denominational RE classroom that conclude that Sweden is a Christian country are not particularly as unexpected as one could imagine in a non-confessional subject. Issues such as national identity or Swedishness were never explicit topics during the lessons, but articulations referring to Sweden, the Christian (Luthern) religion, and Swedish traditions were expressed when talking about other things. The dialogue below is a typical example of articulations of Sweden as a Christian country and Swedes as Christians. These students discussed the meaning of the concept “secular”:

Student 1: Does secular mean being free from religion?

Student 2: Yes, it has been separated from, yes, religion whatsoever. Sweden is secular, so the state and the Church...

Student 3: There are like different degrees

Elev 1: Betyder sekulär att vara fri från religion?

Elev 2: Ja, att det har skilts från, ja, religion över huvud taget. Sverige är ju sekulärt, så staten och kyrkan...

Elev 3: Det finns la olika grader

⁸⁹ Since the 1000's, the geographical area that now comprises the nation of Sweden was considered as part of the Christian world, and throughout the history of Sweden, the state and the church have been closely interrelated. In the Swedish self-image there exist strong mono-cultural notions of being a “unified society” [Swedish: *enhetssambället*] consisting of articulations of one nation, one king, one people, one faith, one language. The unity of faith in the protestant Church of Sweden was one of the cornerstones in the nation building process and this is a central part of instruction (see Chapter 2). The ideology of one “unified-culture” has dominated major parts of the national history and in this pre-modern thinking there was no distinction between church and state. Division into one secular, worldly entity that the state would be responsible for, and one spiritual part of life that the church is responsible for, is a historically young construction. In the case of Sweden, the unity of Church and unity of culture and nation was one and the same (Brohed, 1999). This made the Swedish culture historically strongly associated with Christianity.

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Student 1: But you cannot say that Sweden is non-religious.

Student 2: No, it's not, but we keep church and state apart.

Student 1: Then in 2000, so it's not really that long ago.

Student 2: So the church has no claim on what the state should do.

Student 3: But we still live pretty much according to Christian values.

Student 2: Yes we do.

Me: Mm... When you say you cannot say that it is not religious, how do you mean?

Student 1: They are still Christian and Protestant values.

Student 3: Sweden is still seen as a Christian country.

Elev 1: Men man kan ju inte säga att Sverige är icke-religiöst.

Elev 2: Nej det är det ju inte, men vi håller kyrkan och staten ifrån varandra.

Elev 1: Sen år 2000, så det är ju inte så där jättelänge.

Elev 2: Så kyrkan har inte krav på vad staten ska göra.

Elev 3: Men vi lever ändå efter ganska mycket kristna värderingar.

Elev 2: Ja det gör vi.

Jag: Mm... När du säger att man inte kan säga att det inte är religiöst, hur menar du då?

Elev 1: Det är ju fortfarande kristna och protestantiska värderingar.

Elev 3: Sverige ses ju fortfarande som ett kristet land.

Excerpt 74 (audio-file 19 October 2011).

In the discussion the students mentioned Sweden as an example of a secularized country and stood by the definition that politics and religion should be kept separate (cf. Demerath III, 2007). However one of the students brought up the notion that secularity also has something to do with the degree of religiosity. And, if so, is Sweden irreligious? They knew from previous lessons that Sweden is considered a secular country, “the most secular country in the world” and that many people in Sweden do not want to describe themselves as Christians. Nonetheless, Christian values were something they agreed on. Even if a person does not see him- or herself as religious, one can still embrace such values. Yet, there was never any attempt to define what those values comprised in concrete terms, or what made them specifically Christian. The excerpt is typical in linking the concept of “values” to Christianity. Some teachers pointed out that these values are shared by Jews and Muslims, but in neither case were these values concretized.⁹⁰ In the quote above there is also one of the many examples of how the pronoun “we” was used by students and teachers: “we still live pretty much according to Christian values”. This can be seen as an articulation of identification with what is Swedish and the construction of Swedish culture as

⁹⁰ In the (much contested, see for example Hedin & Lahdenperä, 2000; Linde, 2001) opening paragraph of the curriculum it is stated that: “The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that the education should represent and impart. *In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is to be achieved by nurturing in the individual a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching should be non-denominational*”. (Skolverket, 2011b, p. 4, my italics)

unique and exclusive.⁹¹ A similar use of “we” in order to generate identification with the collective Swedish culture was found by Danielsson Malmros (2012) when she asked upper secondary school students to describe how they reacted to the various aspects of Swedish history.

Describing Sweden as a Christian country did not mean that everyone in Sweden was perceived as Christian in a religious sense. Instead, this related to history and a sense of belonging:

Student. One has, after all, a sense of belonging, you're raised in a Christian country, in the Christian, even if you are an atheist you are living in a Christian country, it's like the foundation.

Elev. Man har ju ändå en tillhörighet, man är ju uppvuxen i ett kristet land, i det kristna, även om man är ateist lever man i ett kristet land, det är ju grunden liksom.

Excerpt 75 (audio-file 14 October 2011).

This student interprets religion and faith in societal and national terms - even if you are an atheist you live in a Christian country. The articulation can be seen in light of ideas about the nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 2006) or notions of religion as a component of the national identity in terms of myths, metaphors, symbols and answers to questions concerning who “we” are (Baumann, 1999; Smith, 2003, 2008).⁹² The student articulated Christianity as a fundamental part of what he perceives as Swedish – Christianity constitutes a national sense of “belonging”, which is not related to religious beliefs but part of the (national) identity. The relationship between nationalism and religion is complex and can be understood in many ways. It can be seen in light of the public debate on notions of the national (in this case Swedishness), homogeneity, and monoculturalism (Brubaker, 2012).

The question of who was to be regarded as Christian or not was not an easy one, neither for students nor teachers. Being born in Sweden was associated with Christianity. In line with the above excerpt, Christianity is in the following excerpt correspondingly articulated as first and foremost a “meeting place”:

⁹¹ Cf. for example Ehn, Frykman and Löfgren (1993), Lozic (2010) and Mattsson (2001).

⁹² Brubaker (2012) distinguishes four approaches of the relation between religion and nationalism: the first treats religion, nationalism and ethnicity as equivalent and corresponding objects. The second uses religion to explain specific examples of nationalism in terms of origin and power structures etc. The third approach consists of the approach mentioned above which perceives religion as part of nationalism and a contributor to the content of the imagined community. The fourth approach focuses specific forms of religious nationalism as a distinct alternative to secular nationalism.

7. "IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN" - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Teacher: It's interesting how you see yourselves, if you're merely born in Sweden and baptized and confirmed in Sweden, which of course is some kind of standard model to many but not all, are you then automatically a Christian? Kevin, and everyone else. How about that? Who is Christian?

Student 1: Christian is a very strong word. Is one a Christian for going to church every Sunday and reading the Bible? Or are you a Christian because you believe?

Student 2: It is up to you to decide for yourself.

Teacher: I do not know.

Student 1: If, therefore, one is... One can still be a Christian, but you do not have to believe in the Bible and attend church and that... I do not know ... it is more like a meeting place.

Lärare: Det är ju intressant, hur ni ser på er själva, om man bara är född i Sverige och döpt och konfirmerad i Sverige vilket ju är någon form av standardmall för väldigt många, dock inte alla– är man då per automatik kristen? Kevin, och alla ni andra. Vad säger ni om det? Vem är kristen?
Elev 1: Kristen är ett väldigt starkt ord. Är man kristen för att man går i kyrkan varje söndag och läser bibeln? Eller är man kristen för att man tror?

Elev 2: Det får man väl avgöra själv.

Lärare: Jag vet inte.

Elev 1: Om man alltså är... Man kan ju fortfarande vara kristen, men behöver ju inte tro på bibeln och gå i kyrkan och så... Jag vet inte... det är väl mer en samlingsplats så.

Excerpt 76 (audio-file 6 October 2011).

The teacher linked being born in Sweden with practicing Christian rituals such as baptism and confirmation. According to the Church of Sweden's official statistics about half of the children born in Sweden are baptized and about 30% of the teenagers attend confirmation classes (Svenska kyrkan, 2015). The students were reluctant to embrace the epithet Christian in a religious sense, but in their articulations Christianity still had some function in the community and in the construction of Swedishness.

The articulated fact that Sweden was to be described as a Christian country generated questions concerning the labelling of all inhabitants as Christians, and this was discussed in different ways. Just like the student above said that one can be an atheist in a Christian country, the teacher in the following excerpt went into great detail about being atheist and Christian at the same time:

Student 1: Where is the biggest, criticism of religion ... or atheism...?

Teacher: Where there are people most atheistic? Yes, then you would probably be up here. (*Points at northern Europe on a map*). Sweden I should think would be in the top five I think. Then the question is how to apply the word Christian. You may well be an atheist and say: "Are you a Christian"? "Yes I am a Christian but I'm an atheist". How the hell can you say that? That one is a Christian and

Elev 1: Var är den störst, religionskritik... eller ateism...?

Lärare: Var man är mest ateistisk? Ja, då skulle man nog vandra uppåt. (Pekar på norra Europa på en karta) Sverige skulle jag tro, skulle ligga i topp fem skulle jag tro. Sen är frågan hur man lägger ordet kristen. Du kan ju vara ateist och säga: "Är du kristen"? "Ja jag är kristen men jag är ateist". Hur fasan kan man säga det då? Att man är kristen och

Elev 2: (*avbryter*) Man är agnostiker!

Student 2: (interrupting) You are agnostic!
Teacher. But you're born in a Christian tradition, right? We use the word Christianity in the sense of being a believer. If someone asks whether you are a Christian then you answer, "No, I'm not a believer, and so on". Then you say that you are not a Christian. However, others would still say that Sweden is a Christian country and the majority of people there are Christians. But if you ask a Muslim or a Jew "Are you a Jew"? they say "Yes, but I do not believe in this with God and this and that". "But are you a Jew then"? "Yes of course I am a Jew". It's more like a label. If I was born to a Jewish mother then you are a Jew, right? One need not be a religious Jew. But you're still a Jew. It's the same with the term Muslim, huh. You do not need to be especially religious, but if you ask whether the person is a Muslim, "Yes, of course I am a Muslim". It's a label. We use the word Christian up here in Scandinavia in a completely different way, which includes going to church, otherwise you are not a Christian. But you can be an atheist and a Christian [*simultaneously*].

Excerpt 77 (audio-file 29 February 2012).

Lärare: Men man är ju född i en kristen tradition va. Vi använder ju kristendomen mera i beteckningen av att är du troende. Frågar nån om man är kristen då svarar man "Nej jag är inte troende och så vidare". Då säger man att man inte är kristen. Men andra skulle ändå kunna säga att Sverige är ett kristet land och människorna där är kristna till huvuddelen va. Men frågar du en muslim eller jude "Är du jude?" säger dom "Ja, men jag tror inte på det här med Gud och det och det." "Men är du jude då"? "Ja självklart är jag jude". Det är mer en beteckning. Är jag född av en judisk mor så är man jude va, man behöver inte vara troende jude. Men du är ändå jude. Det är likadant med begreppet muslim va. Du behöver inte vara speciellt troende, men frågar du om personen är muslim, "Ja, självklart är jag muslim". Det är en beteckning. Vi använder ordet kristen här uppe i Norden på ett helt annat vis, som att går du i kyrkan, annars är du inte kristen. Man kan vara ateist och kristen [*på samma gång*].

As the teacher pointed out it is more common to associate the term Christian with beliefs and church attendance. And if one does not share those beliefs or visit church services most people don't perceive themselves as part of Christianity. But this teacher argued that one can be Christian in a cultural sense, and this goes for Jews and Muslims alike. His reasoning is more common when it comes to Judaism, which is usually described both as a religious and an ethnic category (Andersson & Sander, 2009). Christianity does not usually have this double meaning unless one includes the word "culturally" as in culturally Christian, culturally Catholic (cf. Baumann, 1999).

Nationality and belonging to a religious community can be seen as a constantly created and negotiated identity. Mattsson (2005) highlights five principles: *born in Sweden, citizenship, kinship, culture or language* and *appearance* as dimensions of the "Swedish" which in various ways interact and are activated, emphasized or de-emphasized in different contexts. In the excerpts in this section both notions of Swedishness and being a Christian and the relation between the two are

7. "IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN" - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

negotiated. Azar (2006) argues that definitions of the national are and must be flexible to survive, and they function as structures of power in order to keep the inside/outside boundary intact. In the context of the RE-practice, the Christian heritage was sometimes emphasized but was toned down or completely rejected when the secularist discourse was at play.

Alienation and threat

Many students did not articulate identification with any specific religion in the classroom practice, and as they encountered different religious traditions they did not quite know what approach to take. In this feeling of alienation, religiosity was sometimes perceived as threatening.

The classroom discussions occasionally circled around questions concerning collective identity and religion: What is "our religion"? And what does it mean if we respond that "our religion is Christianity"? Or if the answer is that "we have no religion"? These became problematic questions in the encounter with different worldviews in the context of RE and when encountering the religiosity of "other people", from less secularized countries where religion plays a more noticeable role in the public sphere, both for individuals and community life. But it must be stressed that this does not relate to specific encounters in the classrooms between non-believers and believers; rather, it was in theoretical discussions of what "we" experience in the encounter with "others". In the following excerpt the students talk about themselves as part of Western Europe, Scandinavia and Sweden:

Student 1: We in Western Europe, have like lost more and more of our religion. And then come some people who might have a stronger faith than us in many cases. Everyone doesn't have to have that, but quite a few anyway, everybody is not an extremist. However, what happens is that we in Western Europe, we feel this "where did our identity go, should we not keep our religion". You feel threatened by a threat that may not even exist actually.

Teacher: Yes, it is interesting that, secularization has gone quite far in Western Europe, especially perhaps in Scandinavia. So to answer the question, "What is our

Elev 1: Vi i Västeuropa liksom, har tappat mer och mer av vår religion. Så kommer det människor som kanske har en starkare tro än oss i många fall. Alla måste ju inte ha det, men rätt så många iallafall, alla är ju inte extremister. Men, det blir att vi i Västeuropa, vi känner så här att "var tog vår identitet vägen, ska inte vi få behålla vår religion". Man känner sig hotad, av ett hot som kanske inte ens finns egentligen.

Lärare: Ja, det är intressant att det, sekulariseringen har gått ganska långt i Västeuropa, framförallt kanske i Skandinavien. Så som svar på frågan, "vilken är vår religion", det är inte helt lätt att svara

religion”, it is not easy to answer. Maybe there doesn't even exist anything shared as it perhaps used to do.

Student 2: It is, after all, we are living in a society where we are like basically Christians. So you may still see this as the religion of Sweden.

på den. Kanske inte ens finns något gemensamt längre som det kanske gjorde.

Elev 2: Det är ju ändå, vi bor ju ändå i ett samhälle där vi är kristna i grunden liksom. Så man får ändå se det som Sveriges religion.

Excerpt 78 (audio-file 19 October 2011)

This was the way the conversation went back and forth – on the one hand, identifying as a religious person was not taken for granted, as many completely lacked religious connections both to traditional religious beliefs and to religious practices. Religion was associated with the (ethnic) other (von Brömssen, 2003). This raised the question of what is common and shared in a society, a function religion has fulfilled in the past, but no definite answers were provided.⁹³ Following Anderson's (2006) idea of nations as imagined communities, these students articulated religion as a community-building factor that is lost because others (implicitly immigrants who belong to a religion other than Christianity) have a stronger faith. As shown in previous chapters, the discourse that dominated the classrooms was strongly critical of religion and resulted in a distancing of religion. However, on the other hand, articulations associating Sweden and Swedes with Christianity were also raised. The religiosity constructed as Swedish obviously had nothing to do with extremism. Immigrants were perceived to have a stronger faith, even if “everybody is not an extremist”. It was spoken about as a fact that immigrants have a different (foreign) religion and that religion is important and central in their lives. Thus immigrants are constructed as “more religious” and consequently threatening. The lack of religion does not seem to be a major problem before encountering other people with different backgrounds. More confident religious roots of non-Swedish people were perceived partly as something un-Swedish, but also as a threat:

⁹³Tesfahuney (1999) argues that European education is built on the basis of ethnocentric mono-cultural notions which include a variety of norms, values and descriptions of both what it means to be Swedish and thus what constructions of the deviant, of “the Other” exist. These norms are seldom analysed as they are part of positions perceived as “neutral”. Lahdenperä (2001) argues that the educational system conveys and socializes the students into the common (mono)cultural heritage. In this (unconscious) identity-building process collective prejudices and beliefs are created, maintained and used in the same way as the creation of the image of “Us” and the image “the Other” are.

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Student: Like, many Christians probably feel that they are losing their grip. Even the Church of Sweden has lost a lot of grip lately, the Catholics are losing trust also... and immigration, there are more immigrants, and people probably feel threatened by that too, they have lost their identity, there is an identity crisis for us in the West.

Elev: Typ många kristna känner nog att man tappar fotfästet. Bara svenska kyrkan har tappat massa fotfäste nu bara det senaste, katolikerna tappar ju också förtroende... och invandringen, det blir ändå mer invandrare, och folk känner sig nog hotade av det också, de har förlorat i sin identitet, det blir ju alltså en identitetskris för oss i västvärlden.

Excerpt 79 (audio-file 14 October 2011).

It is interesting to note that the students in both of the last excerpts were using the word “threat”, that they felt “threatened” by immigration and the religiosity of the immigrants. When does insecurity of identity transform into fear of strangers and even xenophobia? Why is other people’s religiosity a problem? In the globalized pluralistic postmodern society there arises a demand for fixed reference points. Even students who did not describe themselves as Christians and had vague notions about Christianity's religious content still identified with Christianity in a cultural sense. National characteristics do not say much about how people live their lives, but describe how Swedes present themselves and through this, the story of Sweden is in itself “Swedishizing” Sweden (Ehn et al., 1993; Hall, 2000). By talking about identity in terms of binary opposites without any intermediate or hybrid positions, both what is Swedish and “the Other” are constructed (Hall, 2005).

“We have Santa Claus” – holidays, religion and culture

One area where articulations of Swedishness were clearly linked to Christianity and where Christianity and Swedish culture completely merged was when holidays and especially Christmas were the subject of discussion.

Holiday traditions and culture were linked to Christianity in a quite natural and unquestionable way:

Student 1: Many of our holidays are Christian too even if we are not religious.

Student 2: We don't celebrate, like Ramadan, whether one's religion is Christian or not.

Student 1: Even if you do not really celebrate like this, religious Christmas, you may not have a Christmas crèche and so on, or...

Elev 1: Många av våra högtider är ju kristna också även om vi kanske inte är religiösa.

Elev 2: Vi firar liksom, inte Ramadan, vare sig ens religion är kristen eller inte.

Elev 1: Även om man inte riktigt firar så här, religiös jul, man har kanske ingen krubba och så vidare eller...

Student 2: But here, what is Swedish, much of society is based on traditions and stuff that is Christian. Swedish culture has pretty much from Christianity. So if we have any religion, it's Christianity.

Student 1: If there is anything that affects us, it is Christianity.

Elev 2: Men så här, det svenska, mycket i samhället bygger ju på traditioner och sånt, det är ju kristet. Den svenska kulturen har ju ganska mycket av det kristna. Så är det nå religion som vi har, så är det kristendomen.

Elev 1: Är det nåt som påverkar oss så är det kristendomen.

Excerpt 80 (audio-file 19 October 2011).

In discussions about Christmas as part of Swedishness the link was articulated as obvious and unproblematic. When talking about Sweden as a Christian country there was some uncertainty and tentativeness in the articulations that parried the secular discourse. When it came to Christmas, this was clearly a Swedish tradition and easy to embrace, regardless if perceived as a religious or cultural tradition. Meanwhile, these opinions are based on mono-cultural ideas of the homogeneous Sweden, where everyone is expected to act much the same way. It became evident in some classrooms that all people in Sweden do not celebrate Christmas for various reasons, which disturbed the picture of the homogeneous mono-cultural Sweden but not the notion of Christmas as part of Swedishness which was a solid part of the Swedishness discourse. In the excerpt above, Christianity is disconnected from its religious content and linked to traditions and culture. In this context it was emphasized that “our” feasts, “our” traditions and “our” culture are linked to Christian roots. And that is done by defining what is not a Swedish tradition: “We don’t celebrate, like Ramadan”.

Celebrating Christmas was basically taken for granted in all classrooms and something talked about as a fact. The Christmas holiday was above all related to practices, not beliefs.⁹⁴ The celebrations can be seen as a total hybridization of Christianity, Norse religion, folklore, and commercialism. Not all students were clear about the religious background of the Christmas holiday, as will be shown in the following excerpt. This lesson was held the first of December and the teacher was about to introduce Christianity. She did so by asking the students if they had started to prepare and decorate for Christmas yet:

⁹⁴ A basic sketch of the Christmas celebration in Sweden, its content and practices: The month before Christmas many people, a clear majority, put electric (usually) seven-branched candlesticks in their windows and hang colourful electric Advent stars there too. If they have candle holders for four candles, one is supposed to be lit every Sunday before Christmas and many bring in and decorate a Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve, it is customary to celebrate Christmas with relatives and family, giving each other presents and eating loads of Christmas food. The months before Christmas the shops are full of Christmas decorations and advertisements related to Christmas.

7. "IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN" - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Teacher: Have you started to decorate for Christmas at home then?

Student 1: Yes!

Student 2: No.

Teacher: What have you put up?

Student 3: Advent candles.

Teacher: Hey, can you stop! You seem to be very "busy" in this half of the classroom!

Student 3: The positive half is busy for once!

[General laughter]

Teacher: You seem to be VERY "busy". Yes.

Advent candles, You have taken out Christmas candles. What does this come from then?

Besides the box you took it out of. Symbolically, what is it from?

Student 2: Is it a symbol of something?

Teacher: Yes, it's actually a symbol of something.

Student 3: The Star I know

Teacher: Wait a minute Lisa, Yes?

Student 5: Judaism, huh?`

Teacher: Yes, good! In what way?

Student 1: They had that, the seven ... seven-branched candlestick.

Teacher: That's right, they had the seven-branched candlestick. And where was it then, the seven-branched candlestick?

Student 2: Synagogue?

Teacher: No.

Student 2: No, what is it called

Teacher: The other...

Student 2: In the Temple!

Teacher: In the temple well, there it was, and then it disappeared 70 A.D., you remember it?

Student 6: Is it Jewish stuff?

Student 7: You have Jewish stuff in your window!

Teacher: Yes, you have one of the oldest Jewish symbols placed in your window

Student 6 [cries out aloud]: No fuck!

The teacher doesn't hear or takes no notice of the comments of student 6 and student 7 but continues the lesson

[...]

Student 3: What is the Christmas star from then?

Teacher: Yes, surely some of you have put up the star as well, what does it come from?

Student 1: The star that shone when Jesus was born.

Lärare: Har ni börjat göra något julfint hemma då?

Elev 1: Ja!

Elev 2: Nej.

Lärare: Vad har ni tagit fram för nåt?

Elev 3: Adventsljusstakar.

Lärare: Hörni kan ni sluta! Ni verkar väldigt "busy", hela den här halvan av rummet!

Elev 3: Den positiva halvan är "busy" för en gångs skull!

[Allmänt skratt]

Lärare: Väldigt "busy" verkar ni vara. Ja. Adventsljusstakar, jul-ljusstakar, har ni tagit fram. Vad kommer den ifrån då? Förutom kartongen ni tog fram den ifrån, symboliskt, vad kommer den ifrån?

Elev 2: Är det en symbol för något?

Lärare: Ja, det är det är faktiskt en symbol för något.

Elev 3: Stjärnan kan jag

Lärare: Vänta lite Lisa, Ja?

Elev 5: Judendomen va?

Lärare: Ja, bra! På vilket sätt då?

Elev 1: Dom hade väl den sju... sjuarmade ljusstaken.

Lärare: Just det, dom hade den sjuarmade ljusstaken. Och var fanns den då, den sjuarmade ljusstaken?

Elev 2: I synagogan?

Lärare: Nej.

Elev 2: Nej, vad heter det...

Lärare: Det andra.

Elev 2: I templet!

Lärare: I templet ja, där fanns den och sen försvann den så där 70 efter Kristus, kommer ni ihåg det?

Elev 6: Är det judegrejer?

Elev 7: Du har judegrejer i ditt fönster!

Lärare: Ja du har en av de äldsta judesymbolerna framställd i ditt fönster

Elev 6 [ropar rakt ut]: Nej fy fan!

Läraren hör inte eller tar ingen notis om kommentarerna från elev 6 och 7 utan fortsätter lektionen

[...]

Elev 3: Vad kommer julstjärnan ifrån då?

Lärare: Ja, julstjärnan har säkert några av er tagit fram också, vad kommer den ifrån?

Elev 1: Stjärnan som lyste när Jesus föddes.

Lärare: Just det, Betlehems stjärna, och den tänkte jag att vi skulle ta vårt avstamp i idag

Teacher: That's right, the Star of Bethlehem, and I thought that could be our starting point today and actually start with Jesus when he was born and when the star was shining. Because that is the background to the stars we hang in our windows. How many of you have stars? Mm, there are many who have that too. And so have you the Menorah too, the Jewish candelabra

Student 6: No!!! Damn, I do not want anything Jewish!

Student 5: What was the Christmas star again?

Teacher: It was the Star of Bethlehem that shone when Jesus was born. But we're going to work in groups later and we'll look at the various traditions surrounding Christmas and the roots they have.

Student 6: No, but damn. I do not think it has to do with religion!

faktiskt starta med Jesus när han föds och stjärnan tänds. För det kommer ju därifrån, stjärnan som vi sätter upp i fönsterna. Hur många har stjärnor? Mm, det är många som har det med. Och så har ni Minoran också, den judiska ljusstaken

Elev 6: Nej!!! Fy fan, jag vill inte ha en judegrej!

Elev 5: Vad kom julstjärnan ifrån då?

Lärare: Det var ju Betlehems stjärna som lyste när Jesus föddes. Men vi ska göra ett grupparbete sen när vi tittar på olika traditioner kring jul och vilka rötter de har.

Elev 6: Nej men fy fan. Jag tycker inte det har med religion att göra!

Excerpt 81 (audio-file 1 December 2011)

In the classroom discussion it was assumed that everybody celebrated Christmas and decorated their homes with Christmas decorations. The teacher wanted the students to see and reflect upon the religious roots of the everyday objects. The fact that one student articulated strongly negative opinions about the religious connection to the Christmas holiday and her negative statement regarding the Jewish origin of the Christmas decorations was ignored by the teacher and not commented on. This student had admittedly Christmas decorations in her windows, but to her, they had no religious significance, and she was provoked by this information that she obviously had not reflected upon previously. I interpret the student's remarks as anti-Semitic as she expressed strong disapproval towards Judaism and Jews. It must however be pointed out that negative comments about Jews and Judaism were unusual in the classrooms. During the study's observations this occurred only on one additional occasion. A similar opinion to the one the student above was expressed when he did not want to go on a field trip to the synagogue on the grounds that he did not like Jews. Negative comments of that kind were far more frequent in the context of Islam and Muslims.

The following scenario also highlights the issue of Swedish culture in relation to Christianity. The starting point was that the students were given an assignment where they were to investigate the background to some of the Swedish Christmas traditions:

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Assignment

Investigate the background to one of the Christmas traditions we have in Sweden. Choose what you want to investigate! Why do we have Santa Claus? Why do we give Christmas presents? Why do we eat [*Christmas*] ham or have candles in the windows?

Uppgift

Undersöka bakgrunden till en av de jultraditioner vi har i Sverige. Välj vad ni vill undersöka! Är det varför vi har jultomte, varför vi ger julklappar, varför vi äter [*jul*]skinka eller har ljusstakar i fönstren?

Excerpt 82 (From task distributed 5 December 2011).

The students presented the assignment in an oral presentation. In the students' presentations it was shown that many of the traditions associated with the Christian festival had evolved over centuries. It became apparent that the traditions were different in different parts of the country, were different in different families and that many of the traditions had roots both in Christianity, Judaism, the Norse religion and ancient Nordic folklore. All this surprised many students and generated interesting discussions. Religions and traditions were represented as constantly changing, and multidimensional. But when starting to work in the classroom, it became clear that several of the students did not celebrate Christmas because of different religious backgrounds, in this case, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Two of the students with a Muslim background raised their hands when everybody was about to start on the assignment and said, “we don't celebrate Christmas” (field notes 5 December 2011). They expressed that they did not feel included in the “we” that were visited by Santa Claus or ate the Christmas ham, which was the implicit premise in the formulation of the assignment.

During the observations at the three schools two people – one student and one teacher – said they didn't celebrate Christmas because of their atheistic beliefs (see excerpt 9 and 41), and they felt that they were regarded as “weird” because they chose not to celebrate Christmas. Most of those who described themselves as atheists still celebrated Christmas and articulated Christmas, like the students in the excerpts (80 and 81) above, as primarily a cultural phenomenon, not a religious one.

“In Sweden we are secular, individualistic and tolerant”

In the classroom students and teachers often liked to associate what is Swedish with concepts such as tolerance, openness to different ways of life, individualism, rationalism and secularity. When talking about religion and trying to describe what kind of religiosity Swedes have, this was a premise.

The secularist discourse in the classrooms contributed to constructing religious people in general as “the Other”. A recurring event was that in their speech both teachers and students assumed everybody in the classroom to be non-believers. Elsewhere, other people might be religious. This was of course not true – there were students in every classroom of this study who in other contexts positioned themselves as believers, as religious, as Christians, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, as spirit believers, etc., but the fact that “we in Sweden” were positioned as solely secular and non-religious was repeated:

Teacher: We're so ENORMOUSLY secularized in Sweden. Religion has no place in most people's life in any way. We may go to church once a year because there's some kid being baptized or someone dies or something like that. And then we do not go there. It is pretty much the religiosity we have.

Lärare: Vi är ju så ENORMT sekulariserade i Sverige. Religion har ju inte nån plats i dom flestas liv på något enda sätt. Vi kanske går i kyrkan en gång om året för att det är nån unge som döps eller nån som dör eller nånting sånt. Och sen går vi inte dit. Det är mycket den religiositeten vi har.

Excerpt 83 (audio-file 7 December 2011).

Here the teacher explicitly referred to the concept of secularization, but in the classrooms of this study secularization wasn't problematized or discussed to any great extent. The term secularity was used synonymously with people not believing in God, attending services, saying prayers, or identifying with any specific creed.⁹⁵ In articulations of the Swedish self-image, tolerance was a central value.⁹⁶ The following quotes originate from a student who in the context of the RE- course met a Catholic monk he perceived as “ethnic Swedish”:

⁹⁵ Cf. Davie (2007) and Taylor (2007, 2011)

⁹⁶ Cf. Danielsson Malmros (2012) and Hjerm (2000).

7. "IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN" - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Student 2: Our western view of how Muslims are and behave, that they are supposed to be savages or something like that, in contrast with a Catholic monk, who actually lives in Sweden who sits and says "it's wrong to be gay". I think it would have been quite funny.

Teacher: That's perhaps not the media image of Catholics?

Student 2: No, Catholics are no problem. It's like pretty close, like, Italy, they're Catholics, what's wrong with being Catholic; there's nothing wrong with that. So when it comes so close actually, it was someone [another student] who got pissed off and had to go out and things like that when they sat down and listened to what he said. And this is like a Swedish guy, it is quite interesting.

Elev 2: Vår västerländska syn på hur muslimer är och beter sig, att dom skulle vara vildar eller nåt i den stilen, i kontrast med en katolsk munk, som faktiskt bor i Sverige som sitter och säger att "det är fel att vara bög". Jag tycker det hade varit ganska roligt.

Lärare: Det finns kanske inte i den mediala bilden av katoliker?

Elev 2: Nej, alltså katoliker är det inget fel på. Det är ju ganska nära liksom, Italien, dom är ju katoliker, vad är det för fel på att vara katolik liksom, det är inget fel på det. Så när det kommer såpass nära som faktiskt, alltså det var ju nån [elev] som blev förbannad och var tvungen att gå ut och såna grejer när dom satt och lyssna på vad han sa. Och det är ju en svensk kille liksom, det är rätt intressant.

Excerpt 84 (audio-file 6 October 2011).

The student articulated astonishment over the fact that a Swedish person expressed such negative views on homosexuality, saying, "it is wrong to be gay". Intolerance towards homosexuals was something he associated with Muslims, not Christians, which he obviously associated with something Swedish and West European. If the statement of negative attitudes towards homosexuality had come from a Muslim person it would have been more in line with the expectations of the student. This intolerant position he didn't expect from a Swedish person, Christian or not. The student is positioning himself as Swedish and Western. Christianity was perceived as Western and "near" and it became problematic when this monk then pronounced perceptions that students thought of as intolerant. In the conception of what is Swedish there is a strong mono-cultural notion of consensus.⁹⁷ A "Swedish guy" should not have opinions that differ from the norm, which is un-Swedish per se. The religion that is perceived as "Swedish" must include tolerance and individualism:

Student 1: It works real well, just look at Sweden just that particular religion of Christianity, it is as good as it gets, although we're individualists. Problems do not occur until other religions clash. Like Islam, like the

Elev 1: Det funkar ju jättebra, kolla på Sverige just, just den religionen som kristendomen, det funkar hur bra som helst, även om vi är ju individualister. Det uppstår inte problem förrän andra religioner kommer i

⁹⁷ Striving for consensus and mutual understanding has been a strong and influential ideal during the twentieth century, not least in the labour market often referred to as *Saltsjöbadandan* based on the agreement between the employer and labour organizations. For a discussion of how this striving for consensus operates in contemporary Sweden see for example Martinsson (2006).

example she gave that 41% of Swedes do not want to mix with Muslims. That's exactly what it is about. Only Christianity is as good as it gets just because people can be so individual. It ought to be like that in the rest of the world too.

[...]

Student 2: Or it is about them thinking freely. I mean, I know a priest, or my, on my dad's side, there's a guy who is a priest, a theologian. And he doesn't mind gays getting married, he has no problem with it at all, and that's the way he sees it. Then there are of course those who refuse. Yes, as I said, we're individualists here in Sweden, you have got the opportunity to choose for yourself. Not a collective interpretation, like "this is how we see life". But the Mormons, they have more like, "this is how we see the Bible, this is our theory". But here in Sweden, based on the Church of Sweden, it is more about individual thinking.

Excerpt 85 (audio file 6 October 2011)

krock. Som islam, där det exemplet hon drog upp att 41% av svenskarna inte ville blanda sig med muslimer. Det är precis det det handlar om. Bara kristendom funkar hur bra som helst just för att man är så individuell. Så bör det vara i resten av världen också.

[...]

Elev 2: Eller så handlar det om att dom tänker fritt. Jag menar, jag känner en präst, eller min, på min farsas sida så är det en kille som är präst, teolog. Och han har ju inget alls emot att viga bögar, han har inga problem med det alls, och det är så han ser på det. Sen så finns det ju såna som vägrar. Ja, som sagt, vi är ju individualister här i Sverige, man har ju fått möjligheten att välja själv. Inte en kollektiv tolkning, liksom "så här ser vi livet". Men mormonerna, där har dom ju mer, "så här ser vi på bibeln, det här är vår teori" liksom. Men här i Sverige, om man utgår från Svenska kyrkan så är det mer individuellt tänkande.

In the conversations about Swedishness, individualism was particularly and repeatedly stressed, as shown in the previous chapters and in the excerpt above. Christianity was in this context interpreted in light of individualism as a basic, fundamental value in Sweden. Individualism and individual choice was highlighted in positive terms, and Christianity in Sweden "works just fine" and "my relative is a normal guy" due to the fact that the kind of Christianity existing in Sweden leaves room for personal interpretations and that the Church of Sweden has chosen to consecrate same-sex couples, which was assumed an example of a tolerant attitude. If one were to take a different position on this issue, it would be perceived as submitting to a collective interpretation, and this was perceived to some extent as "un-Swedish".

In the classroom all religions were articulated as problematic according to the secularist discourse, but some religions, i.e. Islam, were more problematic than others. One reason for this was that Islam was strongly associated with subservience to strict regulatory intervention and thus difficult to reconcile with the individualism and freedom of choice that was so highly valued. The image of Islam is ambiguous and in the classroom there was a constant negotiation of how Islam should be defined. Within the framework of the Swedishness discourse, descriptions of Sweden as a multicultural and pluralistic country also

7. "IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN" - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

occurred. Even this was framed by referring to the fact that the religiosity existing in Sweden was characterized by freedom of choice and individualism. Below are an examples of articulations of pluralism, which still include mono-cultural connotations:

Teacher: If you think of Sweden as such a pluralistic country, that we believe in many different religions. We can choose whether we want to be atheists or how we want to live. We choose very much by ourselves, right? And Islam is also influenced by this. And Christianity too. But this is still one of the most important points. Then it is the case that many Muslims sort of do as they want. There are Muslims who are secular too. Which is a bit more modern, eat pork, and so too, yet still are Muslims. So you cannot say that "you are not a Muslim because..." like that. "You are not wearing the veil so you're not Muslim", on the contrary, in Sweden there is still a choice.

Excerpt 86 (audio-file 28 February 2012).

Lärare: Om man tänker på Sverige som är ett sånt pluralistiskt land att vi tror på många olika religioner. Vi kan välja om vi vill vara ateister eller hur vi vill leva. Vi väljer väldigt mycket själv, eller hur? Och även islam påverkas ju av detta. Och kristendom också. Men det här är ändå något av de viktigaste punkterna. Sen är det ju så att många muslimer gör lite som dom vill. Det finns ju muslimer som är sekulära också. Som är lite mer moderna, äter fläskkött och så också, men ändå är muslimer. Så man kan ju inte säga att "du är inte muslim för att..." så. "Du har inte slöja därför är du inte muslim", utan i Sverige finns det ändå en valfrihet.

Individualism and personal choice is made a Swedish hallmark – everybody chooses what they want to believe, if they want to believe and how they want to relate to various religious doctrines. Christianity was interpreted in terms of individual choice - if you do not choose individually but choose to follow the religious conventions it was articulated as obsolete and non-compatible with being a modern enlightened person. For Swedes, it seemed good to be individualistic, but Muslims were not expected to do as they pleased, rather to adhere to a uniform Islam. The teacher stressed the freedom of choice for Muslims in Sweden and that "modern" Muslims choose not to follow the Muslim food regulations. This teacher worked in a religiously and ethnically heterogeneous class, and several of the students described themselves as part of different Muslim traditions, some wearing the hijab and some not. This teacher wanted to show a nuanced view of both Christians and Muslims – one can be a Christian and a Muslim in many different ways and she wanted to challenge the image of Muslims as completely subjected to following religious rules which was an element that the teaching of Islam constantly reacted and related to. At the same time she articulates something about Sweden and Swedishness – Sweden is pluralistic, characterized by diversity, and freedom of choice for individuals. Her articulation was followed by a heated debate on the

distinction between religion and culture and how religion and culture affect different communities:

Student 2: But I was at the airport in Tunisia, then it was girls, they wore the costumes, they had grilles here!
Student 3: I know, those are the ones who are stupid!
Student 6: They're fucked
Student 1: That's not religion, that's their culture!
Student 3: It is not Islam!
Student 6: It is certainly religion! Do you know why?
Student 1: No!
Student 6: Yes! That is religion!
Student 1: Okay, how do people dress in Sweden?
Student 6: You can dress any way you like because the people do not care!
Student 1: Yes, okay, how do people dress in Europe? Is it in the Bible that it says, you should put on your shorts and put on this and that?
Student 6: That is quite another thing! No, you know, you do not know, listen!
Student 1: No, in Europe you live like that! And in those countries they live like that!
Student 6: But you do not know how the people are over there!
Student 3: It is not Islam! It's their culture!

Elev 2: Men jag var på flygplatsen i Tunisien, då var det tjejer, dom hade på sig hela dräkter, dom hade galler här!
Elev 3: Jag vet, det är dom som är dumma i huvudet!
Elev 6: Dom är fuckade
Elev 1: Det där är inte religion, det där är deras kultur!
Elev 3: Det är inte islam!
Elev 6: Det är visst religion! Vet du varför?
Elev 1: Nej!
Elev 6: Jo! Det är visst religion!
Elev 1: Okej, hur klär man sig Sverige?
Elev 6: Man kan klä sig hursomhelst för att folket bryr sig inte!
Elev 1: Ja, okej, hur klär man sig i Europa? Är det i bibeln det står, du ska ta på dig shorts och ta på dig så och så?
Elev 6: Det är en helt annan grej! Nej du vet, du vet inte, lyssna!
Elev 1: Neej i Europa lever man så! Och i dom länderna lever man så!
Elev 6: Men du vet inte hur folket är där borta!
Elev 3: Det är inte islam! Det är deras kultur!

Excerpt 87 (audio-file 28 February 2012).

The students in this discussion had their background in the various parts of the Middle East and did not agree on what was to be regarded as religious practices compared to cultural practices. In contrast, they agreed that “in Sweden you get to do what you want” as opposed to Tunisia, and that Christianity and the Bible did not affect the culture in terms of how people chooses to dress. One interesting feature here is that these students also use the pronouns “they” and “theirs” about Muslim or Middle East people and traditions, but don’t use the pronoun “we” for Sweden. Islam and Muslims are thus constantly referred to as “the Other”. In excerpt 24 the same articulation is discernible: “Sure, I am a Muslim, but I don’t do ... [what] the people say, what THEY want me to believe in” (audio-file 2 April 2012). Could this be because they do not unambiguously identify with a Swedish “we”? Research shows how students who themselves

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

migrated or have parents who migrated were constructed in school and in other contexts as “immigrants” and therefore special, different and not an integral part of Swedish culture. In Sweden anyone who does not conform to this idea of Swedishness is regarded as an immigrant and has to explain where they “really” come from even though they were born in Sweden. And when they visit their parents' home country, they are regarded as Swedish. This experience sometimes results in an ambivalent attitude towards positioning as Swedish (Lozic, 2010). However, individualism and freedom of choice were in the classrooms of this study portrayed as something that “they” – in this case Muslims in Tunisia and Iraq – did not have because of their religion, but that existed as a precious value in Sweden. In the classes that had several students born or who had parents born in a country other than Sweden this question of culture and religion came up on several occasions. A boy compared e.g. Muslims in Sweden with the Christians in Iraq – they are a minority but still quite numerous. In this context another person brought up that in Iran all women are required to wear a veil and men must wear long trousers and a T-shirt (no vests) regardless if they are Muslims or not – it was described as the culture of the country. It was thus stated that in Sweden people dress how they want unlike in Tunisia, Iran or Iraq.

Although Sweden in many ways is segregated, it is a country that in the past five decades has received many immigrant groups. This means that numerous Swedes (21%) are born or have parents who are born in a country other than Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2015). Most Swedes thus have relatives, classmates, colleagues or neighbours with “foreign origin”. When articulations of “Swedishness as tolerance” are in the foreground, it is entirely possible to simultaneously be both Muslim and Swedish. Students with different religious and ethnic backgrounds share the same classrooms, and in most cases this is a non-issue, nothing that is in focus:

Student 1: Our friends, many of our friends are Muslims. On our football team there are many Muslims

Teacher: Well, maybe you grew up with a certain knowledge that it might not be so incredibly strange really.

Student 2: Our friends, the Muslims I know, they're doing it to make things easier. They do not care at all about their religion really. They do it just because of their parents and

Elev 1: Våra kompisar, många av våra kompisar är ju muslimer. I vårt fotbollslag är det ju många som är muslimer

Lärare: Då kanske ni fått med er det från barndomen en viss kunskap om att det kanske inte är så otroligt märkvärdigt egentligen.

Elev 2: Våra kompisar, dom muslimer jag känner, dom gör ju inte det för egen vinning. Dom skiter fullständigt i deras religion egentligen. Bara att dom gör det för sina

hanging with the family at Ramadan and that kind of stuff, they just go with the flow.

[...]

Student 1: They're out partying and stuff, they do not care at all about that. I don't know if they've been influenced by us, or something. Because the Muslims have Swedish buddies and Swedes have Muslim friends, and there will be the like lessons learned from each other as well.

föräldrars skull och hänger med släkten på ramadan och såna grejer, dom hänger med strömmen bara.

[...]

Elev 1: Dom är ute och festar och grejer, dom skiter ju i det. Jag vet inte om dom har blivit påverkade av oss, eller så. För muslimerna har ju svenska kompisar och svenskar har ju muslimska kompisar, och det blir ju liksom att man tar lärdom av varandra liksom.

Excerpt 88 (audio-file 4 October 2011).

Being Muslim and Swedish seemed to be no problem for these students as long as they “do not care about religion” and being Muslim seemed to be a cultural identity marker. It appeared to be acceptable to believe what you liked, if the behaviour was like everybody else, i.e. “They're out partying and stuff, they do not care at all about that”. It may be tolerable to skip the partying for celebrating Ramadan once a year only if the rest of the time you act “like most people”. Nevertheless, one may note that these students talk about “Swedes” and “Muslims” as identity markers (sc Otterbeck, 2010). However, did they express the view that their Muslim friends are not Swedish? As I perceived this classroom conversation during the participant observation, that was not their opinion. This might be compared to Buchardt's study (2008, 2010) where Muslimness is incompatible with Danishness or Eriksen's (2010) study on how Muslimness and Norwegianness are negotiated. This study does not primarily concern identity and I did not put questions to students concerning whether they saw themselves and others as Swedes and Christians, Swedes and Muslims, etc., but the empirical data is based on articulations during lessons in the classroom. The Swedish self-image of tolerance and respect meant that the official position of the teachers, and also articulated by students, for example in the excerpt above, was that there are no problems being a Swedish Muslim and that you can be Swedish in many different ways under the condition that you act “like most people” and don't display a behaviour that can be perceived as deviant. Tolerance had limitations as will be shown in the next section of this chapter, but tolerance is still a central value in understanding the Swedishness in the classrooms.

National Swedish surveys show contradictory trends: on the one hand, Sweden is the country in Europe where the population to a large extent welcomes immigration. Meanwhile, there is also growing acceptance of xenophobic

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

parties and in the 2014 election the nationalistic xenophobic Sweden Democrats became the parliament's third largest party. The party's main concern is to limit immigration and to stand up for “Swedish values” Other more extreme right-wing populist parties are growing too. This means that the views and the public debate become more polarized (Demker, 2014). Both these trends were distinguishable in the classroom practice.

“Like worshipping Mickey Mouse”: Othering of the religious

In this section, it is worth noting that talk about religion and Christianity is constructed in relation to something else. When religion and Christianity are constructed in relation to the secularist discourse, it generates other connotations compared to when religion and Christianity are constructed in relation to Islam and multiculturalism.

The collective “we” in the classroom was seldom positioned as religious, but it may be noted that some religions and religious practices were more associated with otherness than others – to express beliefs related to private religiosity, and be interested in spiritual matters in general might not be incompatible with the secularist discourse. However to have a faith that implied consequences for reasoning with regard to social and political issues was talked about as problematic and not compatible with being a modern, rational individualistic Swede. Mentioned examples of this were, in particular, people described as extremists and fundamentalist Islamists. But even choosing food, raising children in a religious way or to organising everyday life around prayer times and religious holidays on the basis of religious beliefs was talked about as “strange” and even dangerous. In this way the national identity was constructed through the othering of religious people.

As the excerpts earlier in this and the previous chapter have shown, religious people in general were talked about as “they” even if there were students of different affiliations in the classroom. Religious people in general from different religious traditions were articulated as “strange”, ”crazy”, “deceived” and “unintelligent” – “they” are different from “us”:

Student 3: I think Seventh-day Adventists were the most fun, because they were really crazy! It was great to talk to them, really. It was especially fun when you came

Elev 3: Jag tycker sjundedagsadventisterna var roligast, för dom var verkligen helt galna! Det var jätteroligt att prata med dom, verkligen. Det var särskilt roligt när man kom

so far in your questions so that they really couldn't answer, so we had to leave, because they could not say anything more, it was the best!

Me: In what way were they crazy?

Student 3: They really were like black and white, there is a heaven and there is hell, and all the wars and all the natural disasters, everything is the angel Lucifer who is the devil who has like betrayed God. It really is like this, that's exactly what they believe, like it was in the old days, I feel like. They aren't at all innovative!

Excerpt 89 (audio-file 6 October 2011).

Student: Believing in a God that nobody has seen, I think that's unintelligent. Because if I go around and believe in God, and believe that he will help me, then it is clear that I experience that. They see all this stuff because they believe so much, that's how it is, I think. But they say like this, "no, no, it's only you who cannot see". But I think..., like, it's not logical that there would be a God.

Excerpt 90 (audio-file 13 October 2011).

så långt i sina frågor så att dom verkligen inte kunde svara, så vi var tvungna att gå därifrån, för dom kunde inte säga nånting mer, det var bäst!

Jag: På vilket sätt var dom galna?

Elev 3: Dom verkligen så här svart och vitt, det finns himlen, och det finns helvetet, och alla krig och alla naturkatastrofer, allting det är ängeln Lucifer som är djävulen då som har svikit Gud typ. Det är verkligen så här, dom tror precis på, såsom det var förr känns det som. Dom är inte alls nytänkande!

Elev: Alltså att tro på Gud som liksom ingen har sett, det tycker jag är ointelligent. För om jag går runt och tror på Gud, och tror att han hjälper mig, då är det klart att jag upplever det. Dom ser allt det här för att dom tror så mycket, så måste det vara, tror jag. Men dom såhär, "nej nej, det är bara du som inte ser". Men jag tycker... alltså det är inte logiskt att det skulle finnas en Gud.

In the excerpts religious people were constructed as people living in the past and "not at all innovative" and they were as a group attributed negative characteristics. The student in the second excerpt argues that one sees what one wants to see. But the idea that there could be a God is, according to her, irrational and to believe this is hence unintelligent. Following her reasoning the conclusion is that non-religious people have seen through this myth as they are governed by reason and logic. Religious beliefs were generally presented as outdated and unintelligent. Both these excerpts can be seen as part of a secularist discourse, but this self-image and description of Sweden and the Swedes as modern, enlightened and rational is also part of a national discourse about Sweden as "the most modern country in the world".⁹⁸

In line with this, many students articulated that religion is the result of some people's lively imagination and that this should be addressed in RE. This was in line with the reasoning of the neuroscientist lecture presented in excerpts 11

⁹⁸ Cf. the documentary "Världens modernaste land" [*The most modern country in the world*] broadcast in Swedish television 2006-2007 (Lindström, F., Saleh, T. & af Klintberg, K., 2006).

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

and 22 – people see what they want to see. In the following excerpt one student said that he wants the RE-course to pay more attention to the connection between fairy tales and religions:

Student: I do not understand how you cannot see a connection between religion and fairy tales. This is not brought up enough in my opinion. But you become, it's like I should start worshiping Mickey Mouse for example.
General laughter in class.

Elev: Jag förstår inte hur man inte kan se ett samband mellan religion och sagor. Det tas upp för lite tycker jag. Men man blir, det är som att jag skulle börja tillbe Mickey Mouse till exempel.
Allmänt skratt i klassen.

Excerpt 91 (audio-file 6 October 2011).

To speak in this way was still a bit provocative, but became amusing in the classroom, and classmates and teachers laughed. This was articulated in a context where the class had met with representatives of various religions and philosophies, such as representatives from the Church of Sweden, Mormons, Tibetan Buddhism, Western Buddhism, Secular Humanism, Conservative Judaism, the Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Sweden [Swedish: *Ekumeniakyrkan*]. One of the students told the class that he did not receive answers to his questions, that the representatives gave evasive answers. The teacher wondered what he had asked:

Teacher: What questions did you ask?

Student: I asked, how they looked at, that if a person has an imaginary friend, then that person is considered to be crazy, psycho, that he is not well. But if several people do it, it's a religion. So I wondered how they related to this.

General laughter in the class.

Lärare: Vad ställde du för frågor?

Elev: Jag frågade, hur dom såg på, att om en person har en fantasivän, så anses den personen vara galen, psyksjuk, att den inte mår bra. Men om flera personer gör det, så är det en religion. Så jag undrade ur dom relaterade till det.

Allmänt skratt i klassen.

Excerpt 92 (audio-file 6 October 2011).

The student does not explicitly refer to Richard Dawkins (2006) who in his introduction quotes Robert M. Pirsing the author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: “When one person suffers from delusion it is called insanity. When many people suffer from delusion it is called Religion” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 28) but the student’s articulation is close to Dawkins, and this was not the only time this implicit reference was made by different students in different classrooms. The terms “fantasy lover” or “imaginary friend” appeared several times in different classrooms when talking about believing in God. Through articulations like the one above, or that “the author of the Bible must have been

high on drugs” and “religious people are mind-fucked” and other negative formulations increased the distance to religious people and contributed to enforcing the secularist discourse, and construct a united “we” of the non-religious members of the class. As secularity was linked to intelligence, rationality, and logic, religiosity was associated with the opposite. Many times it was also expressed that religion is “weird” in the sense of hard to understand. Many students could in many cases not at all relate to religion or what function it might have in either the lives of people or in communities that are less secular than Swedish society. For example, some students articulated these views after seeing a documentary about untouchables, Dalit’s, in India. The documentary was shown as part of the RE course when learning about Hinduism:

Student 1: Its crazy how there are so many strange things. It's hard to believe how anyone can have such a wild imagination to come up with everything.

Student 2: How many are there that believe in it, who is it that believes in it?

Student 3: Not only that, you think, how did this come about? Who has said, where has it like come from?

Elev 1: Det är ju så sjukt mycket konstiga saker. Det är ju svårt att fatta hur nån människa kan ha så mycket fantasi att komma på allt.

Elev 2: Hur många är det som följer det, vem är det som följer det?

Elev 3: Inte bara det, man tänker ju, hur har det här kommit till? Vem har sagt, vart har det kommit ifrån liksom?

Excerpt 93 (audio-file 2 April 2012).

Teachers also sometimes articulated in the same wordings that, “we” have a hard time understanding how “they” think, that this is a “foreign” way of thinking. The following conversation took place during a lesson when the students were working in groups on Hinduism and Buddhism and the teacher circulated among the students in the classroom:

Teacher: But I find it hard sometimes to like totally accept Buddhism, for it is after all, something foreign too. Yes.

Me: It's interesting the attention different religions get in ...

Teacher: Yes, in the media and not least in the textbooks. They [*Hindus and Buddhists*] are hard to understand. I mean, we have NOTHING similar to this. It's difficult.

Hinduism is even more difficult to understand, I think, to grasp. It's ... there are so many varieties of them. Nothing is for everyone, somehow, but everything is only for them and them, a few million here

Lärare: Men jag har svårt ibland och liksom helt acceptera buddhismen, för det finns ju det hära, det främmande också. Ja.

Jag: Det är intressant vilken framtoning olika religioner får i...

Lärare: Ja, i media, och i läroböckerna inte minst. Dom [*hinduer och buddhister*] är ju svåra att förstå. Jag menar, vi har ju INGENTING som liknar detta. Det är ju svårt. Hinduismen är ju ännu svårare att förstå tycker jag, att begripa mig på. Den är ju... det finns ju, så många varianter utav dem. Ingenting gäller alla på nåt vis, utan varje sak gäller bara för den och den, några miljoner här och nåt gäller där. Ja... Det är ett gytter...

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

and something applicable there. Yes... It is
a muddle ...

Excerpt 94 (audio-file 29 November 2011)

The teacher assumed a collective we, as she argued that “our” beliefs are different from Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. Her articulation can be seen as a mono-cultural legacy of the unified-society, despite her ambition to promote diversity and pluralism.

People belonging to different religious traditions are often constructed as “the Other”, Muslims and Islam even more so. As mentioned earlier in this section, the national discourse works in another, more distinct way when Christianity is the subject of discussion compared to when Islam is discussed. A negative image of Islam was constructed through associations of Islam as oppression, suicide bombers and blind obedience. Everybody – students and teachers alike – those with a Muslim background and other backgrounds, all related to this negative image, even those who thought that this image does not provide a fair view of either Islam or Muslims.

That the word Islam means submission or to submit was articulated as a core fact about Islam both in teaching and in textbooks used in the classroom in this study. The Swedish word for submission [Swedish: *underkastelse*] has a rather negative connotation, and literally translated means “throwing under”. It is reminiscent of slavery and oppression. In one class, at the end of the lesson the teacher wanted the pupils to write down a summary of the content of the lesson in which the teacher had presented “the basics” of Islam. When they were about to begin writing one student asked:

Student: This bit about Islam, it meant
submitting? Or was it oppression?

Elev: Det där med islam, det var väl
underkastelse det betydde? Eller var det
förtryck?

Excerpt 95 (audio-file 21 November 2011).

In this excerpt the student links Islam to oppression even though the word was not mentioned in class and can be seen as a sign of how strong and natural the negative image of Islam is. It was also mentioned that Islam can be translated as both *peace/serenity* and *submission*, and that Islam means submission in the sense that the Qur'an and the Prophet's example is the best instruction for how life should be lived. That Islam means peace and serenity was received with surprise and wonder as the image of Islam expressed by many students did not contain any representations of peace and serenity, but rather dictatorship,

violence, suicide bombers, terrorist attacks and war. There were no images presented that embodied how peace and serenity could be associated with Islam. There was nothing in the teaching that could challenge the dominant image in this particular regard.

In Excerpt 84 the student starts his reasoning with “Our western view of how Muslims are and behave, that they’re supposed to be savages or something like that”, and a “Swedish guy” that he refers to was clearly not Muslim. “We” were clearly not Muslim (and I want to stress that there actually were students with Muslim background in most of the classrooms) and “our” holidays are not Muslim: “We don’t celebrate, like Ramadan” (Excerpt 80). Swedishness was related to tolerance, individualism and modernity and religion and religious people in general, but Islam was specifically linked to everything opposite. Islam was mainly associated with something strange, foreign and unknown in Swedish culture:

Student 1: It is fairly new in Sweden too.

Student 2: Approximately one hundred years.

Student 1: There has not been so much discussion before

Student 2: I do not know when the first...

Student 1: Muslim came here...

Student 2: Muslim came here, the first immigrants from Muslim countries and so, but it is not very far back.

Student 1: It's only now that they like came in large crowds [*droser*⁹⁹], there have certainly been more Muslims who lived here.

Student 2: In large crowds [Swedish: *droser*]!?

[*Laughter among the others in the group*]

Student 1: Yes, but there have certainly been Muslims who have lived in Sweden for many, many years, but it's only now that they come in large numbers and really start to be more noticeable [...] Although it wasn't like that when the Finnish immigrants began to come to Sweden, that people were afraid of them? But this is more foreign.

Student 2: Yes, it is.

Student 1: That's pretty far from our culture, or our culture, or the Christian culture that's been in Sweden before.

Me: Mm... But what is “far from”?

Elev 1: Det är ju ganska nytt i Sverige också.

Elev 2: Ungefär hundra år.

Elev 1: Det har inte varit så stor diskussion innan

Elev 2: Jag vet inte när första liksom

Elev 1: Muslimen kom hit...

Elev 2: Muslimen kom hit, alltså de första invandrarna från muslimska länderna och så, men det är inte jättelångt tillbaka.

Elev 1: Det är först nu som dom kommit i stora droser⁹⁹ liksom, det har säkert varit fler muslimer som bott här.

Elev 2: I stora droser!?

Skratt bland de andra i gruppen

Elev 1: Jamen det har säkert funnits muslimer som bott här i Sverige många många år, men det är ju först nu som dom kommit i stora skaror och verkligen börjar synas mer.[...] Fast det var la inte så när det kom finnar, när dom började komma till Sverige, att man var rädd för dom? Men det här är ju mer ganska främmande.

Elev 2: Ja, det är ju det

Elev 1: Det är ju ganska långt ifrån vår kultur, eller vår kultur, eller den kristna kulturen som har vart i Sverige innan.

Jag: Mm... Men vad är det som är långt ifrån?

⁹⁹ A home-made word, a mix between “a large bunch” [Swedish: *drös*] and “herds” [Swedish: *border*].

7. "IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN" - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

Student 1: I do not really know, it is portrayed as quite foreign. That it is another religion in general makes like a big difference...

Elev 1: Jag vet inte egentligen, det framställs som ganska främmande. Att det är en annan religion över huvud taget gör la mycket...

Excerpt 96 (audio-file 19 October 2011).

One aspect of the national, concerns notion of Sweden and swedishness related to the geographical area in which the nation state of Sweden has its territory. Many of the articulations of this chapter include statements such as "we in Sweden are ...", "a person living in Sweden", "in Sweden", "If you are born in Sweden". It indicates that what is said applies within the geographical borders of Sweden, and this is something that is perceived as Swedish. Sweden and Swedish culture were spoken about in positive terms, and something that many students and teachers identified with.

Islam was presented as "more" than a religion compared to religion in a "Swedish" sense where religion was confined to a limited part of life. One teacher described the difference between Islam and "our" perception of religion (which one might assume was some form of Christianity?) as a more all-encompassing religion, an approach to life compared with "our religiosity" which was presented as a separate part of life:

Teacher: But the word religion for Muslims is a somewhat broader concept than what we usually mean by religion, so to speak. And the first thing we have to learn and keep in mind is that Islam, it's an ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE somehow. It is not only a distinct part of life, but it is a way of life, an attitude to life. So I thought maybe I'd start with this, the word: ISLAM AS AN ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE and say something about it.

Teacher: Because when we talk about religion then you don't think about an attitude towards life, right? What do you think of? If I say: Religion? Christianity? What do you think of then?

Student 1: Church.

Teacher: The Church? Well, yes. What are you thinking about more?

Student 2: Faith.

Teacher: Faith, yes. But then for Muslims it is, then it is how you behave throughout life, to one's closest family, to creation, the animals, to nature and family, how I eat or what I eat, how I dress, indeed a gigantic

Lärare: Men ordet religion för muslimerna har ett något vidare begrepp än vad vi i regel menar med religion så att säga. Och det första som vi ska lära oss och hålla i minnet det är att islam, det är en LIVSINSTÄLLNING på nåt vis. Det är inte bara en avgränsad del utav livet, utan det är en livsinställning, inställning till livet. Så jag tänkte kanske att jag skulle börja med den, det ordet: ISLAM SOM LIVSINSTÄLLNING och säga någonting om det.

Lärare: För när vi pratar om religion då tänker ju inte ni på en livsinställning till livet eller hur? Vad tänker ni på då? Om jag säger: Religion? Kristendomen? Vad tänker ni på då?

Elev 1: Kyrka.

Lärare: Kyrka? Jaha, ja. Vad tänker du mer på?

Elev 2: Tro.

Lärare: Tro, ja. Men alltså för muslimer är detta, alltså det är hur man beter sig hela livet, till sina närmaste, till skapelsen, till djuren, till naturen till familjen, hur jag äter, eller vad jag äter, hur jag klär mig, alltså en gigantisk

task in life. An attitude toward life, an attitude towards one's whole life.

livsuppgift. En inställning till livet, en inställning till hela livet.

Excerpt 97 (audio-file 7 November 2011).

The teacher began her lesson with the Islamic story of creation and explained the task of humankind as being the representative of God on earth, and that this task entails a huge responsibility. This means that Islam wasn't only related to what is usually characterised as religious or spiritual matters in a Swedish context, such as belief in certain doctrines, but extends to all questions and situations in life. In this group there were students from two different classes. This perhaps contributed to the lack of discussion; the students seemed to be shy and were not confident in the group. An interesting aspect of the excerpt above is that there actually were pupils with Muslim background in the classroom, but they didn't make themselves known in the whole-class discussion. The teacher used the pronoun "they" with reference to Muslims throughout the whole lesson, while the pronoun "we" was supposed to refer to "Christians in a secular sense", and those whose actions in everyday life, unlike Muslims, were not influenced by any religion. Neither did the Christian students in the classroom, of which at least one belonged to the Pentecostal church, discuss the description of Christianity as a limited part of life, which for example some Christians – Pentecostals and others – might object to.

The following excerpt showed that being a Muslim and being Swedish simultaneously, was problematic when it came to certain issues, the veil for example:

Student 1: Ok, at the risk of sounding a bit cruel, but like just because they've got this religion, they shouldn't be allowed to dress up. Should they be allowed to enter completely masked, if a Swede wouldn't be allowed to come in fully hidden from view? It's like, one ought to be able to see who it is.
Student 2: Even if it is part of their religion, they must accept how we do things in Sweden.

Elev 1: Ok, med risk för att låta lite elak så, men liksom bara för att dom har sån religion, så ska inte dom få lov att klä ut sig. Ska dom få komma in helt maskerade, om inte en svensk skulle få komma in helt maskerad? Liksom, man ska kunna se vem det är.
Elev 2: Även om det tillhör deras religion, så måste de acceptera hur vi har det i Sverige.

Excerpt 98 (audio-file 10 November 2011).

Discussing Islam and the veil was a hot topic. Some stated that "they" have to adjust to Swedish society and thus perceived the veil as un-Swedish. Others motivated their rejection with reference to the veil as an expression of oppression and that women were forced to wear it, even though this link to

7. “IN SWEDEN WE ARE CHRISTIAN” - A SWEDISHNESS DISCOURSE

force and oppression was not unopposed. However, this discussion about veils encompassed different positions. Other students made a distinction between different kinds of veils and a hijab was seen as a “normal” veil, “the kind that my mother/friend/neighbour/mother’s colleague wears is okay”; whereas a niqab or burqa, as in the above excerpt, was not. One class read about the first female police officer to wear hijab as part of her uniform, and in the discussions this was presented as a good thing.

Implications and concluding remarks

A striking feature in the classroom practice was articulations of “we”, of how “we” are in Sweden. It was both related to Sweden as a country with a Christian cultural heritage, and to articulations defining “the Other”, the deviant. In the latter case the secularist and the national discourse enforced each other. There was basically no criticism or any negative articulations regarding Sweden or being Swedish. In the classroom practice Swedish culture had positive connotations such as individualism and tolerance (cf. Ariely, 2011; Berggren & Trägårdh, 2006; Danielsson Malmros, 2012; Hjerm, 2000). This was in contrast to the “rest of world”, “in other parts of the world”, “in other countries” where there are other views, other behaviours and practices that are different and un-Swedish. Although nobody claims that Sweden is a “unified society” [Swedish: *enhetssambälle*] any longer, there are strong notions of Sweden as a homogeneous society and these ideas became clear in the encounter with “the Other” (cf. Azar, 2006; Mattsson, 2001, 2005).

One can ask why this is and what implications for connotations of “Swedishness as Christian” this might have. It was apparent that when Sweden was described as Christian in the classroom practice there were vague references to religiosity and spirituality. Nevertheless, Swedish society can at large be described as post-Christian, strongly influenced by Lutheran Protestantism that dominated the Swedish society for centuries. This will consequently affect how teachers and students relate to the subject. Berglund (2013) describes the Swedish subject of RE as “marinated in Lutheran Protestantism” despite the fact that the subject is supposed to be neutral and objective. The very notion of how the concept of religion is understood tends to focus to a high degree on beliefs and not practices or other aspects that can be described in terms of lived religion. Holidays and festivals given attention are foremost Christian and in discussions about Christianity, this religion is loaded with positive connotations

of values of liberal democracy; whereas other religions tend to be associated with authoritarian rule. The Lutheran heritage can hence be seen as part of an unarticulated and unconscious pre-understanding even though there is no explicit reference to this worldview. In Swedish RE, as in the classrooms of this study, the religious traditions were mainly represented through “the man, the book and the faith” (Berglund, 2014), which also can be seen as part of a Lutheran heritage. When the students were asked what they perceived as religion they replied “faith” and “church” (Excerpt 97). Holidays referred to were mainly Christmas and Easter, however also holidays such as Eid al-fitr/Bajram, Chanukah, Vesak and Diwali were talked about in the classrooms, especially when there were students that were part of the different religious traditions who celebrated these holidays.

Lahdenperä (2001) discusses curriculum statements on shared values as an excluding or including discourse. She points out that Sweden is and has for a long time been a multicultural society in terms of population, but the national identity and the school have been ethnically and mono-culturally Swedish. The results in this chapter confirm her findings. The question is: what happens in society when the classroom practice implies mono-cultural notions, when a large group of the students can be described as post-national and have roots in many cultures, and thus have a multicultural identity? In RE classroom practice there were tendencies towards encompassing a national imaginary that encompassed diversity, but simultaneously there were articulations stressing “the Swedish” in a more mono-culturalist way.

The Swedish educational system can in many respects be described as mono-cultural and thus creates images of both self and other. It is clear that Muslims are often taken to represent “the Other”. This is the case in school, in society, and in the public debate (Gardell, 2011; Larsson, 2006; von der Lippe, 2009). The risk that RE might contribute to othering is highlighted in several other studies (cf. Alberts, 2007; Bråten, 2013; Moulin, 2011, 2015; Osbeck & Lied, 2011). This entailed a distanced approach in relation to religion as such and towards believers. Religious people were articulated as “the Other” (cf. Loomba, 2005; Said, 2003 [1979]). When religious people of various traditions are made “the Other” in the classroom and this is not problematized and presented as one of several positions in relation to the subject content, this might inhibit understanding of different interpretations and different people with diverse background, which is part of the aim of the subject of RE.

8. Various educational discourses - A private and an academic rational discourse

One premise in this thesis is that the subject is seen as socially constructed in practice; this construction is found in the interaction between teachers, students and the content. Thus, the subject turns out differently in different settings and the subject is seen as contingent (cf. Englund, 1997). Any teacher, who has taught the same subject, with the same content to different groups of students and in different classrooms, knows that two lessons are never (or never will be) identical. To adjust the content and the way of teaching it can be seen as a sign of teacher professionalism. However, it is the same syllabus that governs the subject, and the knowledge requirements to be reached through teaching are the same, regardless of the context. In previous chapters different discourses of religion, religions and worldviews are described and we have seen how articulations within these discourses contribute to the construction of the subject. The classroom practice is, however, affected by many different factors and this chapter will highlight some of the factors contributing to the contingency of the subject of RE in different educational settings. In this regard, this chapter, more than the previous chapters, is oriented towards general educational features pivotal to the construction of RE in the classroom practice and questions of *how* the discourses were articulated.

During the observations a striking feature was the different ways of speaking in the different classrooms. In some classrooms, the conversations had the character of a more private and informal tone concerning all kinds of topics. This discourse has been labelled a “private” discourse in order to grasp the character of conversation that affected the construction of the subject. What in this chapter is referred to as a private discourse is a privately (and thus to various degrees personally¹⁰⁰) oriented way of talking in the classroom practice, used by

¹⁰⁰ There is a distinction between private and personal. All teaching is and must be personal in the sense that the teacher uses his or her personal experiences and creativity to reach the overall aim of instruction, which is the students’ learning. In this work teachers have different ideas and ideals of how to be a teacher, and use different strategies. In this chapter I want to highlight the fact that both

both teachers and students in a private framing of the subject. This way of talking emerged and was made discernible in contrast to a more formal, school-oriented academic rational discourse.¹⁰¹ When analysing the transcribed audio files, it was clear that both discourses were at play in both vocational programs and programs that are preparatory for higher education, but it was evident that the private discourse was much more prevalent in vocational programs and the academic rational discourse more dominant in programs preparatory for higher education. This chapter will focus on the private discourse and the academic rational discourse related to RE, when and where they were activated, how they were articulated and how these affected the subject of RE.

The private discourse was structured through articulation clusters of *Me, myself and I – articulations in first person, Emotional articulations, Reproducing facts, The relational as the professional and Only to pass*. The academic rational discourse were constructed through articulation clusters of *All human beings – articulations in third person, Analysing, The academic knowledge as the professional and To get high marks*. The two discourses are however presented in parallel.

“Me, myself and I” or “All human beings” – articulations in the first or third person

Manners and the tone used in conversations generally had a more private character in vocational program classes compared to articulations in programs that were preparatory for higher education. The students on vocational programs used the first person to a much higher degree in articulations related to the content of RE. In programs that are preparatory for higher education, the articulations contained formulations in the third person to a much greater extent, which gave the articulations a more general character.

“Sure, I am a Muslim” or “Muslims think...”

When analysing articulations in the different classes, the students on vocational programs more often asked questions based on their private experience and more often positioned themselves in the first person. The following excerpt originates from a conversation in a classroom at a vocational program when the students were working on study questions relating to Islam:

students and teachers used private experiences and examples in a different way in the vocational programs.

¹⁰¹ The concept “academic rational” originates in Deng and Luke (2008). See also Chapter 3.

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

Student 1: So, to be honest, I have not understood the difference [between *Sunni and Shia*] ... But check this out, Lena. I belong to this Islamic religion, the foundation, but then we are not Shia and not Sunni, we are a brand new religion that has arisen now, only a few hundred years ago, we are called the Alawites. And I'm in that religion, but it is not included. Have you heard of it? This Islamic branch?

Excerpt 99 (audio-file 6 March 2012).

Elev 1: Alltså jag själv har inte förstått den skillnaden [mellan *sunni och shia*] om jag ska vara ärlig... Men kolla här Lena, jag tillhör ju den här islamiska religionen, grunden, men sen är vi inte shia och inte sunni, vi är en helt ny religion som har uppkommit nu, bara några hundra år sedan, vi heter alawiter. Och jag är i den religionen, men den finns inte med. Har du hört talas om den? Den här islamska grenen?

This way of positioning oneself within a specific religious tradition and discussing one's own tradition in class was not very common. However, when it did occur, it took place (with one exception) in vocational program classes and they were students who described themselves as part of various Muslim traditions. This, despite the fact that in all the classes I attended there were students who described themselves as active in the Church of Sweden, the Catholic church, the Orthodox church, the Pentecostal Church, the Uniting Church in Sweden, Jehovah's Witnesses, Shia and Sunni Muslim associations organized and based on ethnicity, and larger Muslim congregations affiliated with different mosques, an Alawite association, a Buddhist association and a Hindu temple. As outlined in previous chapters, the representation of Islam had the strongest negative connotations of the world religions and was associated with features such as oppression and submitting to unreasonable rules. Individualism and positioning oneself as a rational individualistic person was just as important to students on the vocational programs as to students on programs that are preparatory for higher education, but it wasn't to the same extent taboo to position oneself as part of a religious tradition in vocational program classes, as for example in the following excerpt¹⁰² from *The Child Care and Recreation Programme*:

Student 2: Yeah, but things that religions say that you should do. Because you belong to this

Student 1: Just because it is so

Student 2: Yes, because you belong to this religion. But I don't feel like that. Sure, I am a Muslim, but I don't do ... [what] people say, what THEY want me to believe in

Elev 2: Ja, saker men som religioner säger att det ska du följa. För du tillhör den här

Elev 1: Bara för att det är så

Elev 2: Ja för att du tillhör den här religionen. Men så känner inte jag. Visst, jag är muslim, men jag gör inte det... folket säger, det DOM vill att jag ska tro på

¹⁰² The same as in Excerpt 24.

Student 1: You decide

Student 2: Yeah right!

Elev 1: Du väljer själv

Elev 2: Ja precis!

Excerpt 100 (audio-file 2 April 2012).

This was especially true for students with a Muslim background studying on vocational programs, and students who perceived themselves as part of a Muslim tradition more often adopted this position in whole-class discussions than other students with other religious affiliations. That students with a Muslim background tend to be more open about their affiliation than students with a Christian background is noted in other studies (see for example Ipgrave and Bertram-Troost, 2008). Is the reason for this related to Islam, ethnicity, a minority position or class or the interplay between these factors? To use the Eriksen's question (2010): "Is 'being Christian' about belief, whereas 'being Muslim' just something you are"? (Eriksen, 2010, p. 272) and thus less affected by the secularist discourse of religion? However, individualism and appearing to be rational and independent were regardless of this just as important to students who positioned themselves within the Muslim tradition and on numerous occasions these students tried to nuance the image of Muslims as oppressed and submissive.

In the academic rational discourse, dominating the classroom practice in programs that are preparatory for higher education, talking about oneself in the first person in relation to a religious position was practically non-existent in the classroom practice. Instead third person articulations were used, (see for example excerpt 4, 56, 78, 79, or 96) which contributed to distancing and impersonalising the content. The exception was, however, positions of atheism which were articulated in the first person both by teachers and students as shown in previous chapters (cf. excerpt 12 and 17), and positions that could be characterised as spiritual were expressed, though mostly in written assignments (cf. excerpt 47, 48, 54 and 73), which might suggest that the secularist discourse and the academic rational discourse enforced each other in the classrooms.

Private or general level

Salient during the observations were different ways of being a student, i.e. "the pedagogical contract" differed in vocational program classes compared to the ones that are preparatory for higher education, and this "contract" was also affected if the private or the academic rational discourse was activated in the classroom practice. The school ethos, social codes, the culture and the jargon

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

differed in some respects. On vocational programs the manner of expressing oneself was generally “more private”, both on the vocational programs where male respectively female students were in the majority.¹⁰³ Students were more private in whole-class discussions regarding any topic, and could tell everyone about last weekend's revelry, boyfriends and personal experiences and problems of various kinds. This did not occur in the same way in the classrooms of programs that are preparatory for higher education, where the students' role was commonly more “school-oriented” and general. Usually, personal experiences and personal examples did not have the same function in the instruction given in the two kinds of programs.¹⁰⁴ The students on programs that were preparatory for higher education were more often asked to use subject-specific concepts, explain the context, draw conclusions, and connect their description to an analysis, not just offer a description or an example. To illustrate the difference, I will present a glimpse of two different classrooms where the classes worked on the meaning and function of religious rites. The first excerpt is from the programs preparatory for higher education *Social Science Program* and the second from the vocational program *Business and Administration Program*:

Teacher: Can be an everyday practice, does not have to be, it depends if you do it every day, or do it with some regularity, but one doesn't have to do it. The concept of rite, here, now, you have a chance to shine here!

Student 3: It may be a commonplace thing, if, for example one prays several times a day. It's an everyday thing, but it will of course still have a greater significance despite its being practiced every day.

Teacher: Yes. Would you elaborate on that?

Student 1: It has to be linked to a myth, that there is a story behind the practice. Like, Jesus was born on Christmas, that's why you celebrate Christmas.

Teacher: You suggest that there's a connection between myth and rite here? Mm ... okay.

Lärare: Kan vara vardaglig, behöver inte vara det, beror på om man gör det varje dag, eller gör det med en viss regelbundenhet, men man måste inte göra det. Rit-begreppet här, nu får ni liksom glänsa här!

Elev 3: Det kan ju vara vardaglig grej, om man till exempel ber flera gånger om dan. Det är ju en vardaglig sak, men det blir ju fortfarande, har ju en större betydelse trots att det är varje dag.

Lärare: Ja. Vill du utveckla det?

Elev 1: Det måste vara kopplat till en myt, att det finns en historia bakom att man gör så. Typ, Jesus föddes på jul, därför firar man jul.

Lärare: Du pekar på att det finns ju ett samband mellan myt och rit här? Mm... okej.

Elev 2: Man kan samla ihop människor, och vissa riter kan ju vara heliga. som Jesus till

¹⁰³ Both vocational programs and programs preparatory for higher education are quite segregated in regard of gender and class, see Skolverket (2015a).

¹⁰⁴ This difference is in line with results from other studies that from different perspectives compare vocational programmes to those that prepare students for higher education (Hjelmér, 2012; Kärnebro, 2013).

Student 2: One can gather people, and some rites may be holy, Jesus for example, Easter, for example, that you do because of his resurrection, it is holy. And it's also to get people together so they can experience the feeling that they experienced.

Teacher: Well, then re-experiencing, once again.

Student 3: I was thinking of bar mitzvah, it's a rite, to become a man. And it is a sacred act, and it is their view of humanity, to become a man in that way.

Teacher: So you see a link between ritual and view of humanity?

Student 3: Yes.

Teacher: More links?

Student 3: It is holy also.

Teacher: It is holy yes. View of humanity, we'll touch on that concept later, see if we can put all the connections together (...) If anything is sacred, what is it like, then?

Student 3: It is, well, inviolable and means a lot to a large mass of people.

Teacher: Yes, can be, and may even be for a single individual. Is there any correlation between the sacred and the other concepts?

Student 1: Sacred rites, such as marriage or stuff like that. It can be both individually and collectively, individually or things that you share with others.

Teacher: That's right, the rite gets its status through this way of thinking, and the sacred is then linked to faith. There's a connection between faith and rites even then. Good!

Excerpt 101 (audio-file 7 October 2011).

exempel, påsken till exempel, gör man ju för hans uppståndelse, den är ju helig. Och det är ju också för att få människor samlade och så får dom uppleva den känslan som dom upplevde.

Lärare: Ja, att man på nytt upplever, en gång till.

Elev 3: Jag tänkte på bar mitzva, det är en rit, att bli man. Och det är en helig handling, och det är deras människosyn att bli man så.

Lärare: Så du ser en koppling mellan rit och människosyn?

Elev 3: Ja.

Lärare: Fler kopplingar?

Elev 3: Den är helig också.

Lärare: Den är helig ja. Människosyn, vi tar det begreppet sen, så ser vi sen om vi får ihop alla kopplingar (...) Om nånting är heligt, hur är det då?

Elev 3: Det är väl, okränkbart och betyder väldigt mycket för en stor massa av folk.

Lärare: Ja, kan vara, och kan även vara för en enskild individ. Finns det nåt samband mellan helig och dom andra begreppen?

Elev 1: Heliga riter, som giftermål eller sånt. Det kan vara både individuellt och kollektivt, individuellt eller saker som man delar med andra.

Lärare: Just det, riten får ju sin status genom att man tänker så, och det heliga är då kopplat till tro. Det finns ju en koppling mellan tro och rit också då. Bra!

This lesson started with the concept of rites, and then the teacher asked the students to come up with examples in order to understand different aspects of this. The discussion focused on the concept and the relation between rites and other concepts. The teacher did not ask for their personal opinion or personal experiences in relation to the subject, but the discussion was aimed at exploring aspects of the concept of rites. This can be seen as an example of how a basic level of knowledge was used in the RE-practice, contributing to the construction of the academic rational discourse. It was clear that the way the students approached the subject also affected what was made possible to learn

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

– through the teacher’s questions, but also through the students’ answers, different aspects of the concept emerged.

In a class on the *Business and Administration Programme* the students were given the task of presenting Christian rites (the teacher in her instruction used the word “act” [Swedish: *handling*] not the word “rite”) such as baptism, confirmation, communion, marriage and burial, based on the following questions, written on the whiteboard (from fieldnotes 7 november 2011):

- When do Christians perform this act [Swedish: *handlingen*]? (Regularly, on a special occasion... etc.)
- Why is this act performed? Background?
- What religious meaning has the act?
- How is the act performed?
- What role has the church in the act?
- What percentage of the population perform this act?

In the following excerpt the teacher first described the task and then talked with two students working on baptism:

Teacher: Please include a little question or two at the end that you can discuss in class. Like, how many people here in the group want to get married in a church, and where will you get married otherwise or whatever it is about. How many celebrate traditional Easter, or something related to what we talked about. Okay? Or how many here in class have been baptized and whether you want to baptize your own children and yes... (...) And how are children given their names?

Student 1: But the parents come up with a name...

Student 2: But if I want him to be named Oscar...

Student 1: But when you write in this, to ...

Student 2: When you get proof that the kid is baptized, where...

Student 1: But you have got a name when it is part of Sweden, like.

Teacher: But how does it get there then?

Student 1: You get a paper like, or...

Teacher: Almost before you come home from the hospital, it lands in the mailbox, then they have got wind of the fact that a kid has been

Lärare: Ha gärna med nån liten fråga på slutet så ni kan diskutera i klassen. Typ, hur många vill gifta sig i kyrkan här i gruppen, och var ska man gifta sig annars eller vad det nu handlar om. Hur många firar traditionell påsk, eller nåt som anknyter till det vi pratat om. Okej? Eller hur många som är döpta här i klassen och om ni vill döpa era egna barn och ja...(…) Och hur får barnet ett namn?

Elev 1: Men föräldrarna kommer på ett namn...

Elev 2: Men om jag kommer på att han ska heta Oscar...

Elev 1: Men när man skriver i det här, till...

Elev 2: När man får beviset på att ungen är döpt, där...

Elev 1: Men man får ju ett namn när den finns med i Sverige, liksom.

Lärare: Men hur kommer det dit då?

Elev 1: Man får ett papper typ, eller...

Lärare: Nästan innan man kommit hem från BB så kommer det neddimpande i brevlådan, då har dom fått nys om att man har fått en unge va. Och det skickas från

born huh. And that is sent from the hospital. And then a piece of paper arrives from the tax office, so that this child will be registered as living in Sweden and get a national insurance number and everything, it goes really fast. And this paper should be submitted within three months, and that's when the baby gets its name. But baptism is something completely different, and even a child-naming ceremony, well then it is celebrated that you have been given this name. And children are mentioned by name at baptism. But the child does not OBTAIN the name when baptized.

Student 1: Have you baptized your children?

Teacher: Yes, I have done so.

Student 1: I don't want to baptize my children, I want to have one of those naming ceremonies.

Teacher: Well, then you can have that instead.

Student 2: Do you want to, should we write about the naming ceremony as well?

Teacher: I had this thought, what role does the church play in the naming ceremony? One can baptize the children at a naming ceremony, but you can also have [only] a naming ceremony.

Excerpt 102 (audio-file 7 November 2011).

sjukhusen. Och sen kommer det hem ett papper från skatteverket, så att det här barnet hamnar i folkbokföringsrullarna och får ett personnummer och allting, det går jättefort. Och det där pappret ska man skicka in inom tre månader, och det är då barnet får sitt namn. Men dopet är något helt annat, och även

namngivningsceremoni, ja då firar man väl att man har fått det här namnet. Och barnen nämns ju även vid namn vid dopet. Men barnet FÅR ju inte sitt namn på dopet.

Elev 1: Har du döpt dina barn?

Lärare: Ja, det har jag gjort.

Elev 1: Jag vill inte döpa mina barn, jag vill ha sån namnceremoni.

Lärare: Ja, då kan man ha det istället.

Elev 2: Vill du, ska man skriva om namngivningsceremonin också?

Lärare: Jag tänkte så här, vilken roll har kyrkan i namngivningsceremonin? Man kan ju döpa barnen som en namngivningsceremoni, men man kan ju också ha [enbart] en namngivningsceremoni.

The conversation concerned specific practical aspects of the act/rite. The questions concerned a concrete, practical level, but were also very personal. The basic level, i.e. the meaning and function of baptism compared to similar rituals with the same function¹⁰⁵ within other traditions was not touched upon, nor was there a comparison between different kinds of rites. This affected how religiously motivated acts/rites could be understood. The question whether the teacher herself had chosen to baptize her children or not contributed to the private discourse. Later during this lesson the conversation focused on the rite of marriage – but again in terms of the private experiences of students and the teacher with detailed talk about wedding dresses, flowers and hairstyles.

Articulations of a private character were in many cases not related to the topic of the lesson – in many cases they consisted of separate tracks. Either the classroom-conversation comprised records of facts *or* articulations relating to private matters. When the teacher asked for personal opinions on subject-related issues, the examples generally stopped with the concrete personal

¹⁰⁵ The teacher did not highlight the religious motivation or function of baptism, that the child is baptized into Christ, which is the common religious account of this rite.

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

example and these were not used as a way of improving a more generalised understanding of concepts, to develop second order concepts. On several occasions, the example ended with quite solid one-dimensional statements “yes, this is an example of the Muslim view of women, the Catholic catechism or the Hindu view of the soul”.

These differences noticed during the observations of RE confirm results from other studies comparing vocational programmes to programs that are preparatory for higher education from different perspectives (Anderson Varga, 2014; Hjelmér, 2012; Kärnebro, 2013). Norlund (2009), who studied critical reading of non-fictional texts in upper secondary school, concludes that students on vocational programs encounter different texts and different expectations of achievement compared to students on programs that are preparatory for higher education, or put differently, using Bernstein’s (1999) concept of vertical and horizontal discourse, this type of instruction “prevent[s] vocational pupils’ induction into the vertical discourse” (Norlund, 2009, p. 6). On programs that are preparatory for higher education the personal illustrations were less private and many times the students referred to more generalized examples. The teachers who taught on programs that are preparatory for higher education more often posed questions directed towards the different religious traditions, not towards the student’s personal experience and thus much more frequently made use of the vertical discourse (Bernstein, 1999), the scientific concepts (Vygotskij, 1975[1972]) or second order concepts, which consolidated the academic rational discourse in these classrooms.

Emotional articulations

Within the two educational discourses, the social ethos for socially accepted behaviour diverged, and this was especially true concerning articulations that can be labelled emotional expressions. Unlike in the academic rational discourse, emotional articulations were a striking feature within the private discourse.

Part of the private discourse was articulations of rather strong emotional vocabularies. In some of the observed classes the jargon was quite harsh, and the students sometimes positioned themselves through jokes with a racist and anti-religious edge.

A RE-lesson in year 3 at the Industry Engineering Programme together with The Vehicle and Transport Programme. All of the 22 students are boys. The students have seen a documentary on Islam and are expected to write answers to questions on Islam, but many do not. Instead, negative comments about Islam are tossed around in the classroom. Several of the students, about one third in this class, have described that they have a Muslim background. One guy who earlier had said that he thought that there were too many immigrants in Sweden, yells: "Allahu Akbar! Ahhhaaaa" (imitating a muezzin) "You know: The Quran is toilet paper, the bible is toilet paper too. And the Jews, what do they have? Toilet rolls"! General laughter in class (...) In the documentary they have seen there were images from Cordoba. One student yells: "They don't eat pork! Why do they call their mosque the sausages"?

Excerpt 103 (field notes 2 March 2012)

En religionskunskapslektion åk 3 på industriprogrammet och fordonsprogrammet. Samtliga 22 elever är killar. Eleverna har sett en dokumentärfilm om islam och ska svara på några frågor om islam, men många gör inte det. Istället flyger negativa kommentarer om islam och muslimer i klassrummet. Många av eleverna, ungefär en tredjedel beskriver att de har muslimsk bakgrund. En kille, som tidigare sagt att han tyckte det var för mycket invandrare i Sverige ropar: "Allahu Akbar! Ahhhaaaa..." (härmar ett böneutrop) "Vet ni vad: Koranen är dasspapper, bibeln är också dasspapper. Och judarna, vad är det de har - toarullar!" Allmänt skratt i klassen (...) På dokumentären de sett visades bilder från Cordoba. En elev ropar: "De äter ju inte fläskkött! Varför kallar de sin moské för korvarna"?

Both these "jokes" are a play on the similarities between the Swedish words "toilet rolls" [Swedish: *toarullar*] and "Torah scroll" [Swedish: *Torah rullar*] and "Cordoba"¹⁰⁶ and "the sausages" [Swedish: *korvarna*]. Classrooms where this kind of jargon was used were part of the normality, were mainly on male-dominated vocational programs (see, for example, Excerpts 14). However, this kind of "jokes with an edge" also occurred on programs that are preparatory for higher education but there legitimacy was claimed through reason. The fact that the use of jokes as a special linguistic genre in educational settings dominated by students with a non-academic background is widely recognized in research. Central in this tradition of research is Willis (1977) who showed how boys use loud and provocative language in order to construct positions in opposition to the school culture that was perceived as a middleclass project – in order to become "one of the lads" this kind of behaviour and language was expected. Other studies which focus on jokes in vocational education state that joking can both be seen as a strategy to gain and maintain status, but also a way to contribute to the constructions of groups and borders between "us" and "them" (Ohlsson, 2003). Olsson (2003) studied the use of jokes in relation to gender and concludes that boys used jokes more frequently and especially in

¹⁰⁶ Referring to the Caliphate of Córdoba that existed in current Spain from 929 to 1031.

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

gender-mixed groups. Kärnebro (2013) highlights jokes in the vocational classroom as expressions of resistance and adaptation, as a strategy to increase the sense of unity and belonging in the group, create identity and status in relation to the teacher and other schoolmates, and to mark that they are distancing themselves from schoolwork.

Even in gender-mixed vocational programs such as *the Business and Administration Programme*, there were articulations containing emotional expressions. In the following excerpt the class were talking about the religious background of everyday objects:

Teacher: And so have you the Menorah too, the Jewish candelabra

Student 6: No!!! Damn, I do not want anything Jewish!

Student 5: What was the Christmas star again?

Teacher: It was the Star of Bethlehem that shone when Jesus was born. But we're going to work in groups later and we'll look at the various traditions surrounding Christmas and the roots they have.

Student 6: No, but damn! I don't think it has to do with religion!

Lärare: Och så har ni Minoran också, den judiska ljusstaken

Elev 6: Nej!!! Fy fan, jag vill inte ha en judegrej!

Elev 5: Vad kom julstjärnan ifrån då?

Lärare: Det var ju Betlehems stjärna som lyste när Jesus föddes. Men vi ska göra ett grupparbete sen när vi tittar på olika traditioner kring jul och vilka rötter de har.

Elev 6: Nej men fy fan! Jag tycker inte det har med religion att göra!

Excerpt 104 (audio-file 1 December 2011).

This conversation originates in a discussion of the religious roots of Christmas, something this student strongly rejected and she also articulated an anti-Semitic stance, which the teacher either did not hear or ignored (see Excerpt 81). The use of this kind of strongly negative emotional articulations in relation to the content of RE, which can be seen as part of the private discourse, did not occur at programs that are preparatory for higher education.

Sometimes the classroom-discussions got out of hand and resulted in animated disputes concerning the content related to RE. One example of this was a conversation in which religion and culture were discussed in a class on the vocational program. The teacher was trying to nuance and problematize the image of Islam and Muslims when the discussion became heated and the students raised their voices. Below two quite extensive excerpts from a lesson about Islam will be quoted in order to illustrate the use of different emotional articulations within the private discourse. *Student 1, 3, and 4* position themselves as Muslims whereas *Student 2 and 7* position themselves as “Swedish and secular”:

Student 1: Well, here's what it says [*in the Quran*] ... listen! Here's what it says!

Teacher: Hey, you are to discuss this, but you should not raise your voice!

Student 1: It says like, your ... private parts

Student 3: Dress modestly!

Student 1: Private parts and then only your husband may see. So it's up to you. It does not say "you must, you must wear a veil, you must go dressed like that".

Student 2: That's why I think it's so damn stupid when people force

Student 3: It depends on where you live!

Student 4: In the Quran it says, dress modestly!

Student 6: Well, look, Anna, I'll explain to you, here in Sweden if you go out with like a bikini, they'll check you out, it's nothing, it's normal. But if you go out with bikini in Iraq, either they rape you, I promise, it is fact! Even if you go out there with a simple veil, or just a plain veil, they will look at you that way, and so they will do that to you. You do not understand Walla! It's totally fucked up over there!

Excerpt 105 (audio-file 28 February 2012)

Student 1 and *Student 6*, who both positioned themselves as Muslims, were shouting at each other and did not take notice of the teacher who tried to calm down the discussion.

Student 3: That is not Islam It's their culture!

Student 6: You don't know what you are talking about! You don't know how the people are over there, have you been to Iraq?

Student 3: No, I have never been to Iraq, but still, Iraq is not Muslims, they are not, that is not Islam!

Student 6: Shia originates in Iraq!

Student 1: You disgrace Islam!

Student 6: What, I disgrace Islam? I am just saying how it is!

Teacher: Hussain!

Student 6: It is like that over there!

Student 3: They make their children who are fucking two years old wear hijab!

Student 6: But it is like that! That is how it is, it is society that has done that.

Elev 1: Jo, det står [*i Koranen*] så hära... lyssna! Det står så hära!

Lärare: Hallå, ni får diskutera, men ni får inte höja rösten!

Elev 1: Det står så hära, dina... privatdelar

Elev 3: Klä dig anständigt!

Elev 1: Privatdelar, och så, ska bara din man få se. Alltså det är upp till dig själv. Det står inte "du ska, du ska ha sjal, du ska gå runt så"!

Elev 2: Därför tycker jag det är så djävla dumt när folk tvingar

Elev 3: Det beror på var man bor!

Elev 4: I koranen står det, klä dig anständigt!

Elev 6: Alltså, kolla, Anna, jag ska förklara för dig, här i Sverige om du går ut med typ bikini, dom kollar på dig, det är ingenting, det är vanligt. Men om du går ut med bikini i Irak, antingen så våldtar dom dig, jag lovar, det är fakta! Även om du går ut där med en simpel slöja, eller bara en vanlig slöja, dom kommer att titta på dig så, och så kommer dom att göra så till dig. Ni fattar inte Walla! Det är helt fucked up där borta!

Elev 3: Det är inte islam! Det är deras kultur!

Elev 6: Du vet inte vad du snackar om! Du vet inte hur folket är där borta, har du vart i Irak!?

Elev 3: Nej jag har aldrig vart i Irak, men fortfarande Irak är inte muslimer, dom är inte det, det där är inte islam!

Elev 6: Shia kommer från Irak!

Elev 1: Du skämmer ut islam!

Elev 6: Vadå, jag skämmer ut islam! Jag säger bara som det är!

Lärare: Hussain!

Elev 6: Det är så det är där borta!

Elev 3: Dom låter sina små barn som är fucking två år ha på sig slöja!

Elev 6: Ja, men det är så! Det är så det är, det är samhället som har gjort så

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

Student 1: That is not Islam. That disgraces Islam! (...)

Student 2: Stop yelling so we can hear what everybody says!

Student 6: You don't know what you are saying, she doesn't know what she is talking about!

Teacher: Hussain!

Student 6: She's putting words in my mouth! Fuck!!!

Teacher: Now that is enough!

Student 1: Why do they put on those things? If it's not their culture or their religion, why do they wear those things?

Student 6: I say again, society, you don't know how society is over there!

Teacher: Hussain and Lana!

Student 6: Please, beat her!

Teacher: Do you want to leave?

Student 6: You have been to Kurdistan, right? How is it there? They check out the women a lot, they are sleazy? They are, and then what does he say, what does your husband tell you? Does he tell you, but yes, put on bikini and let them look at you, does he say that? He says, put on a fucking robe and let them only see your face!

Student 1: It's their tradition, their culture, that's why!

Teacher: No that is enough! I really don't want to

Student 6: Like, I

Teacher: Enough!

Student 6: I'm just trying to explain, she is a fucking retard. She is fucking retarded. Walla! She is retarded, I have told my mother that you are retarded!

Student 2: We can't have religious education as a subject at school!

Student 7: We are being brainwashed!

Teacher: Can you be quiet now! We are ending this now!

Student 1: People must be able to handle differences, we have to

Student 7: But you can't handle it, you are like monkeys!

Student 2: He believes in something, I believe in something and so

Student 1: One have to be able to admit when one is wrong and right

Elev 1: Det är inte islam! Det där skämmer ut islam! (...)

Elev 2: Sluta skrika så att vi hör vad alla säger!

Elev 6: Du vet inte ens vad du säger själv, hon vet inte vad hon snackar om!

Lärare: Hussain!

Elev 6: Hon säger sånt jag inte ens har sagt! Fucking!!!

Lärare: Nu räcker det!

Elev 1: Varför tar dom på sig sådant! Är det inte, det är varken deras kultur, det är inte deras religion, varför tar dom på sig så?

Elev 6: Jag säger igen, samhället, du vet inte hur samhället är där borta!

Lärare: Hussain och Lana!

Elev 6: Snälla misshandla henne!

Lärare: Ska ni gå ut?

Elev 6: Du har varit i Kurdistan, eller hur? Hur är det där borta? Dom kollar mycket och dom är sliskiga? Dom är det, och då måste man, vad säger, vad säger din man till dig då? Sägar han till dig, ja ta på dig bikini låt dom kolla på dig, säger han så? Han säger ta på dig en fucking dräkt, låt dom endast kolla på ditt ansikte!

Elev 1: Det är deras tradition, deras kultur, det är därför!

Lärare: Nu räcker det! Jag vill egentligen inte

Elev 6: Alltså jag

Lärare: Nu räcker det!!!

Elev 6: Jag försöker bara förklara, hon är en fucking retard! Hon är fucking efterbliven! Walla! Hon är efterbliven, jag har sagt till min mamma att du är efterbliven!

Elev 2: Vi kan inte ha religionskunskap som ämne i skolan!

Elev 7: Alltså, vi blir hjärntvättade!

Lärare: Kan ni vara tysta nu! Nu bryter vi!

Elev 1: Människor ska kunna hantera olika, vi måste ju

Elev 7: Men ni kan ju inte hantera det, ni är ju som apor!

Elev 2: Han tror på nåt, jag tror på nåt, och så

Elev 1: Man ska kunna erkänna när man har fel och rätt.

Student 6: Lana, you know what you are going to admit? That you are mentally retarded. That you will have to admit because you are! (...)

Teacher: I don't think you can convince anybody through just raising your voice. Then I know

Student 3: But Arabs are speaking here, We talk like this, that's how it is!

Teacher: Now it is enough! I really don't know, now we'll move on. I know that you have these differences, and I think it is good that they come up to the surface. But there is also, the lesson can't just freak out. So when I say it is enough then you have to respect me as a teacher. Of course you are entitled to have your opinions and thoughts, there should not be any censorship. But there is a limit in here.

Student 2: It's not possible to discuss religion.

Elev 6: Lana, vet du vad du ska erkänna? Att du är mentalt efterbliven! Det ska du erkänna, för du är det! (...)

Lärare: Jag tror inte man kan övertyga nån bara genom att höja rösten! Sen vet jag

Elev 3: Men det här är araber som pratar! Vi pratar så, det blir så!

Lärare: Nu räcker det. Jag vet egentligen inte, nu ska vi gå vidare. Jag vet att ni har dom här olika åsikterna, och jag tycker det är bra att det kommer upp här till ytan. Men det finns också, lektionen kan inte bara flippa ut. Så att när jag säger att nu räcker det, då får ni också respektera mig som lärare. Ni får naturligtvis ha era åsikter och tankar, det ska inte vara någon censur. Men det får också gå till en viss gräns här inne.

Elev 2: Religion går inte att diskutera.

Excerpt 106 (audio-file 28 February 2012).

It must be added that this kind of heated debate was an exception – this was the only time during my observations that the discussion reached this level of animated quarrel. Disputes between teacher and students occurred on a few occasions but were usually not about what was being taught; rather they mainly concerned the use of cell phones or laptops for other purposes than studying, absenteeism at lessons or tests. Open disputes between students concerning RE-related issues did not occur during class apart from this occasion. If this kind of emotional articulation is an exception, a reasonable question might be why this example is included in the thesis. The reason is that I want to show one kind of situation that an RE teacher must be prepared to handle, as religion and related matters can stir up strong emotions. I interpret the situation as the teachers being aware of, and maybe afraid that this kind of animated discussion could occur, especially in classrooms where the private discourse dominated. To avoid this they used different strategies (which will be outlined below), for example, stricter focus on facts and/or relationship building.

In the excerpt there are examples of strongly negative judgements made upon students present in the classroom and this kind of expression was not unusual on the vocational programs, but this did not occur during the observations of programs that are preparatory for higher education, where the academic rational discourse was much stronger. However, with the experience of the possibility that the discussions might go this way, as in the example

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

above, it might be understandable if the teachers draw the same conclusion as *Student 2* (who positioned herself as “Swedish” and secular with a Swedish ethnic background) in the above quote – “We can’t have RE as a school subject” and “It is not possible to discuss religion” and stick to less controversial questions.

To be emotionally involved can be perceived as an inevitable part of learning. However this level of negative emotion and personal dispute probably did not contribute to the learning related to the aims of RE, which is why these aspects of the personal discourse can be seen as a hinder in reaching the aim of the RE-course.

Reproducing facts or analysing

One way of handling these emotional articulations was to focus the teaching on reproducing facts, which had consequences for the constructions of the subject in different contexts. In one respect, the private discourse can be described as student-oriented; whereas academic rational discourse is more content-oriented. At the same time, facts occupied the larger bulk of the teaching content in classrooms where the private discourse dominated. How is this related?

In general, (in 17 of the 21 classes) the subject of RE was organized around teaching about the world religions, which were divided into linear or circular religions, and one separate section concerning ethics. Of the 17 classes that organized the teaching in this way 8 were vocational programs and 9 programs that were preparatory for higher education. It was a common feature to start with basic concepts or the history and development of each religion. During the observations it was striking that to a much higher extent the instruction on vocational programs was fact-oriented. This might seem like a contradiction as it has been described above that the personal articulations were more prevalent in vocational program classes and that it could thus be characterized as more student oriented. In this section it will be displayed how the orientation towards facts took different forms.

The teaching of RE on both kinds of programs was mainly about sorting out what the different words and concepts such as monotheism, Trinity, sacraments, Eightfold Path, the five pillars etc. meant. Tests and assessment focused on this kinds of issues to a large extent. A common way of working with students on vocational programs was to give the students study questions

to work on during class, and the teacher tried to help the students in answering them individually. The following are two examples of these kinds of questions that were handed out in two different classrooms in vocational programs:

Buddhism - study questions

1. Siddhartha Gautama. Describe briefly who he was!
2. What are the central thoughts of Buddhism? Develop!
3. Explain: Dhamapada, Vesak, Anatman
4. Buddhism is also called...
5. The most common symbol in Buddhism?
6. The word Buddha means?
7. What are the four noble truths? Explain!
8. What is the meaning of nirvana?
9. What can be compared between a church and a mosque in Buddhism?
10. The Buddhist creed is called... Explain!
11. Despite the fact that the original Buddha was Indian, Buddhism differs from Hinduism a great deal. Give examples!
12. Explain briefly: Theravada, Lamaism, Bodhisattva, Dalai Lama
13. What is Zen-Buddhism?

Islam – study questions

1. What is the meaning of ISLAM?
2. What are the five pillars of Islam? Also explain the meaning of every pillar!
3. What does the expression *The night of Power* stand for in Islam?
4. Describe the life and background of Mohammed. What role has he played in Islam?
5. How is the Quran organized?
6. In Islam how does one generally perceive
 - a. good and evil?
 - b. view of man?
 - c. view of creation?
 - d. view of God/Allah?
7. What is a hadith?
8. What food-regulations are there in Islam?
9. What is Sharia?
10. Explain the divide between Shia and Sunni-Muslims.
11. How is marriage viewed?
12. What does the expression *Insha'Allah* stand for?

Excerpt 107 (Study question distributed to the students 13 December 2011 and 6 March 2012).

In the vocational classes observed during this study, working with this kind of question took up most of the lesson. On programs that were preparatory for higher education these kinds of study questions also occurred occasionally, but were mainly given as homework and the lessons were generally spent on lectures, whole-class and group discussions or individual work with long essays or reports.

The teachers expressed the reason that they emphasized facts was the need for “basic facts”, “hooks to hang knowledge on” which they perceived many students lacked. This was necessary before they could discuss and reason in a more analytical and philosophical way (cf. religious literacy von Brömssen, 2013; Wright, 2004). Several of the teachers argued that knowledge of facts must precede more analytical oriented teaching, but that the RE course had

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

insufficient time to manage both to work on facts and to develop more analytical abilities.

One of the vocational classes were instructed to write a three-page essay about Islam. It was to include the following “important concepts”:

Monotheism, Muhammad, the Quran, Orthopraxy, Orthodoxy, The Five Pillars (1. Creed 2. Prayer 3. The tax, 4. Fasting, 5. Pilgrimage), surah, Kaaba, mosque, imam, caliph, Sharia, jihad, Sunni - and Shia- Muslims, fundamentalists/ secularists/modernists/traditionalists, the spread of Islam; In which countries? Muslims' daily lives; marriage, gender roles, diet, clothing.

After this list of concepts the instruction ends with this requirement:

And finally, YOUR OWN reflections/analyses/thoughts!

Excerpt 108 (assignment distributed to the students 2 March 2012)

This assignment was distributed at *the Electrical and Energy Programme*. The students were expected to search on the Internet to find the facts. In this class there were only male students and according to the teacher, many of them had, major difficulties in reading and writing. Several of the students expressed that RE was “boring”, “meaningless”, “nothing new compared to comprehensive school”. There were also a large group of students who were interested in religion because of their own faith and said that they had looked forward to discussing this in class, but expressed that they were quite disappointed with the teaching. According to them, their knowledge and experience of religion was not acknowledged in the lesson. Teaching Islam consisted of watching a documentary, and then working on study-questions individually, and then individually write the above assignment. To a large extent instruction consisted of reproducing facts. Teaching in terms of content oriented explanations, questions, discussions and dialogues in classrooms, where the private discourse dominated, did not take up a large portion of the lesson. In these classrooms the students had fewer opportunities to practice developing analytical abilities, to for example contextualise and analyse Islam as a historical and societal phenomenon. In the above excerpt, the teacher encouraged the students to reflect, analyse and express their own thoughts, but did not guide them in their work or provide examples of how an analysis of Islam might be accomplished.

When the academic rational discourse was at play, the teachers generally expressed higher expectations for the student’s abilities. They also guided the students with questions, which made them practice analysing and thus develop

their analytical skills. Even when it came to definitions of certain concepts, in the process of working out a common understanding and definition, the teacher guided the students with questions instead of presenting a single definition:

Teacher: If we together try to find a definition of what a myth can be! If we repeat, what is a myth? What does it stand for? How can it be structured?

Student 1: It is a story.

Teacher: A story?

Student 1: Yes... like, that gives knowledge about something.

Teacher: Yes, what characterizes such a story, or might characterize such a story?

Student 2: It often tries to give answers to existential questions.

Teacher: Yes...?

Student 2: Why do I exist?

Teacher: Yes. Are there any more examples of existential questions that can be present in myths?

Student 3: What is an existential question?

Teacher: Yes, excellent that you ask, what is it? What is an existential question?

Student 1: It's a living...

Student 4: It might be about creation of the world and what happens after death and the meaning of life and...

Teacher: Yes, exactly! The kinds of questions people pose concerning their existence.

Student: Our myths are more like wisdom about how to live your life?

Teacher: can be, can also be... How would you fill in this image of what a myth can be?

Student 5: Doctrines about gods and stuff.

Teacher: Absolutely. It could have connections to religions. Like that they think something higher, some higher principle or unity above the human. Yes...

Student 1: One wants to describe things you don't know anything about. Like if, or, the historical disappears, dies, and then one wants to explain why it looks like it does, about relations and stuff.

Teacher: Things you find inconvenient and hard to understand at all, one wants

Lärare: Om vi skulle gemensamt försöka hitta en definition av vad en myt kan vara! Om vi bara repeterar, vad är en myt överhuvudtaget? Vad står dom för? Hur kan den vara utformad?

Elev 1: Det är en berättelse.

Lärare: En berättelse?

Elev 1: Ja... som eh, som ger kunskap inom någonting.

Lärare: Ja, vad är det som utmärker en sån berättelse, eller kan utmärka en sån berättelse?

Elev 2: Den försöker ofta ge svar på existentiella frågor.

Lärare: Jaha...?

Elev 2: Varför finns jag?

Lärare: Ja. Har vi fler exempel på existentiella frågor som kan vara aktuella i myter?

Elev 3: Vad är en existentiell fråga?

Lärare: Ja, det är utmärkt att du frågar, vad är det? Vad är en existentiell fråga?

Elev 1: Det är en levnads...

Elev 4: Det kan väl vara hur världen har skapats och vad som händer efter döden och vad är meningen med livet och...

Lärare: Ha, just det. Såna frågor som människor ställer om sin existens.

Elev 1: Våra myter är väl mer en lärdom om hur man ska leva livet?

Lärare: Kan också vara, kan också va... Hur skulle ni fylla ut den här bilden av vad en myt kan vara?

Elev 5: Läran om gudar och så.

Lärare: Absolut. Det kan alltså ha koppling till religioner. Alltså att de tänker sig något högre, någon högre princip eller enhet som står över det mänskliga. Ja...

Elev 1: Man vill försöka beskriva det som man inte vet något om. Alltså om man, eller ja, det historiska försvinner ju, dör ju, och då vill man förklara varför det ser ut som det gör idag, med förhållanden och sånt.

Lärare: Saker som man tycker är obekvämt eller svårt att egentligen förstå överhuvud taget, vill man ju

Elev 1: Typ som skapelse

Lärare: Just det, det blir mer begripliga. Mer?

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

Student 1: Like creation.

Teacher: Absolutely, it become more comprehensible. More?

Student 2: Almost never fixed, one can debate whether they are true or not.

Teacher: That you can for sure. And they might not claim to be true or false, they are stories.

Elev 2: Nästan aldrig satta i sten, dom liksom kan du debattera dom, om dom är sanna eller inte.

Lärare: Det kan du absolut det. För dom gör kanske inte heller alltid anspråk på att vara absolut sanna eller falska, för det är ju berättelser.

Excerpt 109 (audio-file 27 September 2011).

Facts in the academic rational discourse had another role than in the private discourse. Facts were considered important as a starting point, but reproducing facts was not the centre or the main aim of instruction. Many times the teachers on programs that were preparatory for higher education assumed that the students had the factual knowledge (which was not always the case) and asked questions that forced the student to take into consideration different perspectives, and they increased the complexity of the discussions by introducing diverse viewpoints. The facts were put into a larger context and had a more theoretical and abstract character. The above quote is characterized by the existence of many different answers, not a single correct answer. This also means that there may be opposing views where people think differently. In the private discourse articulations of facts the character of reproducing facts and the tone of the discussions was more definite and more often it had the character of finding out “how it is” and accordingly more analytical conversations became rare.

Could it be that the teachers in the context of vocational programs avoided a more exploratory discussion as they saw a risk that students would express opposing opinions and the teachers feared they would not to be able to handle that kind of conflict? This can be seen, for example, in comparison to one of the teachers in Eriksen’s study (2010) who uses the same strategy and interrupts conversations in order to calm the class down. In my field notes I had the following interpretation of the way one of the teachers on a vocational program related to the content of RE:

She [*the teacher*] brought up what prayer could be, what it might mean to a believer. I perceive that this is her aim with the course – to give the students tools to understand other people, to meet the other, but also a general aim of bildung and as an important part of democracy.

Hon [*läraren*] tog också upp vad bön kan vara, vad det kan innebära för en troende. Jag uppfattar att det är det här som är hennes ambition med kursen – att ge eleverna redskap för att förstå andra, att kunna möta andra men också i någon sorts allmänbildningssyfte och som en viktig del av demokratin. Och att

And to nuance the images of the different religions, turn and twist prejudices. At the same time I can feel that she is a bit afraid to enter to much into the students perceptions, follow up, contextualize and problematize their questions, even if she does that to a limited extent.

nyansera bilden av de olika religionerna, vända och vrida på fördomar. Samtidigt kan jag känna att hon är lite rädd att gå in för mycket i elevernas föreställningar, följa upp, kontextualisera och problematisera deras frågor, även om hon i viss mån gör det.

Excerpt 110 (field notes 12 March 2012).

The choice of organizing the instruction in a less analytical direction, using basic questions and assignments with a simple fact-reproducing character can also be seen as an adaption to the students' reactions. Norlund (2009) suggests that when teachers try to adapt to the students' reaction some of the analytical aspects are lost. The teachers in her study did not see this as a way of avoiding challenging the students but rather being realistic – if the students, for example, simply do not do any homework or refuse to work on certain tasks, the teacher needs to find ways of helping the students at least achieve some of the goals. Teachers with high expectations for student performance, who have ways of challenging and encouraging the students, are listed as crucial for student achievement in Hatties (2009) meta-analysis of educational research concerning achievement.

One paradox in the classroom practice of RE in vocational programs was that on the one hand the private discourse opened up for emotional articulations, which sometimes became difficult to handle. On the other hand, the vocational classroom practice was also marked by the extensive use of fact-oriented study questions where students were expected to work individually with reading and writing. One way to understand this is that the teacher tried to handle a demanding social environment through occupying the students with individual tasks, and this might have been a successful strategy, as heated disputes were unusual. Reproducing facts rather than practicing analysis can also be seen as part of the social reproduction of class. Studies of other school subjects show that the expectations for vocational students' academic achievement are far lower than on students attending a program that is preparatory for higher education, but also that instruction had a significantly lower level of abstraction (Andersson Varga, 2014; Beach, 1999; Korp, 2006; Rosvall, 2012).

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

Professionalism through the student-teacher relationship or academic knowledge

The teachers used different strategies in order to gain authority and enhance students' learning. Within the private discourse strategies involved articulations of relationship building whereas claiming authority through academic knowledge was less successful in this context. This last strategy was a possible approach in the academic rational discourse.

In the private discourse relationship building had a central role in teaching. Relationship building had a somewhat different character in different classrooms, partly due to the personal orientation of the teacher, but this was also related to different cultures in vocational programs and programs that are preparatory for higher education – the “pedagogical contract” had a different character for both students and teachers. On vocational programs, the caring and fostering aspects of the teaching profession were more often in the foreground:

The teacher rushed into the classroom a bit late at 8:30. He started the lesson by saying: “You are all guys here, with one exception (*which was me*) and I only want to tell you one thing: When in the future you hopefully have children – take the chance to go on parental leave with them! It is wonderful, so amazing! I have been off with my son, reading stories and skiing!”

This teacher works in this way all the time I have noticed – to be some kind of role model and build relations. During another lesson he warned them to never ever drive drunk and told about the consequences that might have. One can feel that he likes and cares about these guys and he works a lot on building relations and being a grown up in the world of the students.

Excerpt 111 (field notes 16 March 2012).

Läraren ångade in i IP-klassen lite sent 8:30. Han inledde lektionen med att säga – ”Ni är ju alla killar här inne, med ett undantag (*alltså mig*) och jag vill bara berätta en sak för er: När ni i framtiden förhoppningsvis får barn – ta chansen och var pappaledig med dem! Det är underbart, så fantastiskt. Jag har varit iväg med min son och läst sagor och pratat och åkt skidor!”

Den här läraren jobbar lite så hela tiden har jag noterat – att vara en storts förebild och bygga relationer. Under en annan lektion varnade han dem t.ex. för att aldrig någonsin köra bil alkoholpåverkad och vilka konsekvenser det skulle kunna få. Man känner att han tycker om de här killarna, och han arbetar mycket på att skapa relationer och vara en vuxen i elevernas värld.

Both teachers and students contributed with stories from their personal lives, about children, families and relatives, deaths, infidelity, memories from childhood, personal opinions about various topics and things they heard on the news. During the observations it became apparent that when the private discourse was at play the teachers used relation-building strategies as a

professional strategy to gain authority in the class, and this strategy was more frequently used in vocational programs. The academic rational discourse involved professional strategies of gaining authority in the classroom through academic and subject specific knowledge. This can be interpreted as an expression of diverse ruling school ethos, mainly determined by class. The teachers in this study showed and articulated in different ways that they really cared about their students, who they liked and wished well for the future. They strove to relate to and acknowledge them, and expressed understanding and sometimes concern for the social situations of the students. This was true for all the teachers in this study, but the social problems were generally more frequent in the vocational programs, which made these teachers spend more time on these kinds of issues. The teachers talked about this as part of their professional work as teachers.¹⁰⁷

In some classes there was quite a lot of fuss and unrest; students arrived late, did not bring their books or computers, went out during class, wandered around in the classroom when they were supposed to work, talked to each other or used their computers or cell phones for other purposes than school related tasks. Through this kind of behaviour, the relationship was tested and the teachers used different strategies to gain control in the classrooms (cf. Lilja, 2013). The teachers' main strategy, in order to create a focused study environment in such situations, was to admonish the students not to walk around, not go on Facebook, not to talk etc. On programs that were preparatory for higher education this strategy was more efficient than in vocational program classrooms where this strategy was less successful. Strategies that seemed to work better in vocational program classrooms included relation-building aspects, such as listening to the students and interfering with what they were doing, but in doing so listening to and endorsing the student, captivating the

¹⁰⁷I bring this up as a difference that didn't occur in the same way on other programs, but this must not be exaggerated – the personal conversations did not occupy the majority of the lesson time, but did occur, both on programs that were preparatory for higher education, but even more so on vocational programs. Cf. Hjelmér (2012) who notes that conversations about health were much more frequent in the classrooms of the *Child Care and Recreation Programme* where the teachers asked students about their health, about headaches and fatigue, on a daily basis. This can be contrasted to the *Natural Science Programme* where this kind of conversation did not occur. It is well documented that this can be related to the issue of class differences in health, which have a strong correlation to educational level, income and class. Hjelmér (2012) also perceives these conversations about personal health issues among the students and teachers on the *Child Care and Recreation Programme* as a legitimate topic both in private and in public and a factor that affected the student-teacher relation and the general tone in the classrooms.

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

students by showing interest in them, what they think and feel. Reprimands from the teacher often had the form of jokes or irony:

The teacher checks attendance. The students talk to each other.

Teacher: Have you started to decorate for Christmas at home then?

Student 1: Yes!

Student 2: No

Teacher: What have you put up?

Student 3: Advent candles

Teacher: Hey, can you stop! You seem to be very “busy” in this half of the classroom!

Student 3: The positive half is busy for once!

Laughter

Teacher: You seem to be VERY “busy”.

Yes. Advent candles, You have taken out Christmas candles.

Läraren tar närvaron. Eleverna pratar med varandra

Lärare: Har ni börjat göra något julfint hemma då?

Elev 1: Ja!

Elev 2: Nej

Lärare: Vad har ni tagit fram för nåt?

Elev 3: Adventsljusstakar,

Lärare: Hörni kan ni sluta! Ni verkar väldigt ”busy”, hela den här halvan av rummet!

Elev 3: Den positiva halvan är ”busy” för en gångs skull!

Skratt

Lärare: VÄLDIGT ”busy” verkar ni vara. Ja.

Adventsljusstakar, jul-ljusstakar, har ni tagit fram.

Excerpt 112 (audio-file 1 December 2011).

Instead of confronting or correcting the students the teacher in this case uses irony, to get the students’ attention. Generally the private discourse resulted in a rather kind and friendly tone. The impression was that both teachers and students in most cases liked each other. The students expected the teacher to be a “cool and reasonable” grown-up-person who they could turn to in various situations. The teachers also used this relation as an argument in order to make the student work and do various assignments and tasks.

Only to pass or only to get high marks

Assessment and grading is an inescapable part of education in upper secondary school. In the private discourse just passing the course with the mark Pass/E was a prominent feature, whereas high marks were central in the academic rational discourse.

The students on vocational programs expressed many times that they were not interested in the subject, but they attended the class. The majority expressed that they wanted to do what was expected of them, but the main focus was to “pass”.¹⁰⁸ This was particularly true for male students on vocational programs,

¹⁰⁸ The grading system in Lpf 94 (2006a) had three levels: *Pass*, *Pass with distinction* and *Pass with special distinction*. The grading system in Lgy 11 (2011b) is E, D, C, B, A where E is equal to Pass.

but to a large extent this was also true of female students on vocational programs. I interpreted the students' wording and body language in the classrooms as meaning that it was not completely acceptable to be engaged and show a great interest in studying, even though some students outside the classrooms occasionally expressed that they looked forward to studying "their own religion". Articulations of interest had to be balanced with jokes or other articulations stressing that they were distancing themselves from their teachers' expectations. This might also have contributed to the informal and private character of the teacher-student relationship – in the cases when the students clearly declared that they did not have any aspirations for anything higher than a pass, and the teachers were not encouraged by the students to challenge them academically, the teacher's role became more personal and oriented towards relationship-building than content-oriented and academic.

This attitude might also be understood as an expression of lack of academic confidence and fear of not performing well enough to pass. At lectures on vocational programs the teacher was frequently and repeatedly interrupted by the question whether this or that fact would be on the test, "Do we have to know all five pillars of Islam"? "Will all the sacraments be on the test"? The teachers thus tried to calm their anxiety and reassure the students that they would definitely manage to pass the test. In doing this they were very specific and told the student exactly what they needed to know and not know. This contributed to and enforced the orientation of reproducing facts rather than developing more analytical and abstract knowledge. In conversations with the teachers during the observations, teachers working on vocational programs more often talked about the social and relational aspects of their work, compared to teachers who only worked on programs that were preparatory for higher education, who were more engaged in reflections concerning subject related matters.

The culture of being satisfied just to pass and insecurity and lack of academic confidence affected how the teachers outlined the teaching, or maybe this culture was a consequence of expectations for student achievement and constructions of tasks (cf. Andersson Varga, 2014; Korp, 2006). Several of the teachers at vocational programs organized their teaching and constructed tests and assignments with the aim of making everybody pass, but offered students with aspirations for higher marks extra assignments. For example, in one class students who wanted higher marks than just "Pass" were offered the opportunity to write an essay analysing how religion in general and Hinduism

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

in particular could be understood from different perspectives in relation to the novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The teacher said that there were a few girls who had expressed a desire to write the essay, but she wasn't sure whether they actually would do it. To my knowledge, they did not do the extra assignment.

On programs that were preparatory for higher education the relation between the students and the teachers had to some extent a different character. The students expressed expectations that the teacher ought to be an expert in his/her subject. It was also important not to get into conflict with the teacher, as the teacher was the one with the executive power of giving out marks. They did not criticize the teacher openly even on occasions when they were critical, which students on vocational programs did more or less instantly. In that way the students on programs that were preparatory for higher education seemed more aware of the asymmetric power relation, but didn't challenge it. The position as student also differed between the programs. The position as student in the academic rational discourse was linked to expectations of taking their studies seriously and there was no "shame" in receiving a higher mark; on the contrary higher marks were something many of the students explicitly stated that they expected and strove for as they needed high marks to get into university. In general, the teachers expressed higher expectations for these students, even if there were variations in this large group.

In 1994 a goal-oriented marking system was implemented in the Swedish school system and as a result a strong movement promoting "assessment for learning" has developed (Jönsson, 2013; Klapp Ekholm, 2010; Lundahl, 2011). In order to enhance learning the teacher is to make explicit to the student the goals of the course subsections, what competencies and knowledge the students should have achieved and what qualities of knowledge (s)he has to show in order to achieve higher marks. In all classes, the teachers showed the students the syllabus for RE, and in many cases they referred to the syllabus when introducing a new segment of teaching. Requirements for different marks were usually written on the same paper as the instructions for the different assignments so that the student would know how they were to be assessed and thus what to do to achieve different marks. Observations showed that there was a tendency among students on programs that were preparatory for higher education to focus on these requirements, which often had the form of assessment rubrics or checklists of knowledge and competences related to each task. As these rubrics and checklists made it clear to students what was expected

of them, it also tended to make the learning-process instrumental, which affected RE-goals of understanding and reflection. The same contradiction is highlighted by Dinama (2010).

That relationship building is central to the teaching profession and an important factor for student achievement is well documented in research (cf. Aspelin, 2015; Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Yates, 2013; Johansson, 2009; Lilja, 2013). Relations grounded in trust are built through the teachers' caring about the students, listening to them but also by setting limits and standing up to a student's resistance of limits and expectations (Lilja, 2013). It is not possible for teachers to ignore the students' experiences, since they are a factor in the learning process. Aspelin (2015) describes a central aspect of the teaching profession as a "pedagogical differentiating process", which involves the teacher's ability to alternate between closeness and distance in relation to the students. However, there seems to be (but does not have to be) a contradiction between having a trusting relation to the student and working on conceptual understanding and analytical ability.

Implications and concluding remarks

Depending upon whether the private or the academic rational discourse dominated the classroom, the construction of RE in the classroom practice was affected in different ways which had consequences for possibilities of learning. The private discourse was more prevalent in vocational programs than in programs that are preparatory for higher education, and the academic rational discourse dominated at programs that are preparatory for higher education.

It is well documented in several studies how class, gender and power are constructed, manifested and reproduced in classroom practice (see e.g. Ambjörnsson, 2004; Connell, 1996; Hjelmér, 2012; Jonsson, 2013; Kärnebro, 2013; Rosvall, 2012; Willis, 1977). This is however not the focus of this study, but it was obvious that different aspects of intersectionality and the interplay of class, gender and ethnicity together affected the construction of the subject. The issue of class was, unlike ethnicity and gender, not discussed per se, but in relation to the subject of RE in the empirical data of this study, class stood out as a distinguishing factor. It was, however, not possible to separate from ethnicity and gender. Differences in behaviour, articulations and attitudes appeared more clearly between vocational programs and programs that were

8. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES – A PRIVATE DISCOURSE AND AN ACADEMIC RATIONAL DISCOURSE

preparatory for higher education than between how male and female students or students of different ethnic backgrounds expressed themselves. I interpret this as an expression of social background i.e. class as a determining factor for the interaction in the classrooms and a factor that influenced the social codes dominating the different classrooms. Meanwhile, the different programs are largely gender-segregated and imaginaries about gender and ethnicity also affected how students positioned themselves in the classrooms. The two kinds of programs were characterized by diverse school-ethos, which set the rules and expectations for both teachers and students (cf. Johansson, 2009), and the interplay between the students and the teacher had a somewhat different character.

There are different sides to focusing on private experiences. If a person is to understand “the Other” or make the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar, which is central in non-confessional integrative RE, a starting point must be to develop awareness of the persons own inherent views, which he/she might not be aware of but take for granted. From a cognitive and pragmatic educational perspective, it is necessary to include personal experience – all new information must be integrated with previous understanding – no one is a *tabula rasa*. The teacher needs to understand what the students comprehend in order to arrange the teaching to improve the students’ understanding (Säljö, 2015). One potential risk of one-sidedly emphasizing private aspects is that only personal experience is confirmed and the analytical aspects are lost. This can be seen in light of theories of everyday/common and scientific concepts (Vygotskij, 1975[1972]). The everyday concepts refer to specific objects, but the school’s main task is to help students to improve their language and to develop theoretical and more generalised knowledge as well as scientific/second-order concepts. In order to grasp scientific concepts the student must encounter the words in various forms, in new situations and contexts. Students need to develop a language that can serve as an intellectual tool in order to develop a more generalized knowledge and to be able to analyse aspects of religion, for example, as a historical and social phenomenon, discern similarities, differences, nuances and more complicated contexts and correlations. Put differently, if the private discourse becomes hegemonic the students are prevented from internalizing the academic rational discourse and a deeper but also more theoretical kind of knowledge. Anderson Varga (2014) studied writing repertoires in the school subject of Swedish in different programs. She argues that the construction of tasks given to students in the different categories of

programs contributes to social reproduction of class and gender as the students on vocational programs are only encouraged and expected to move horizontally; whereas the students at programs that are preparatory for higher education are challenged and expected to be able to discuss and elaborate within the vertical discourse. To manage in the educational system, students need guidance and help in that process, not least students with a non-academic background. In many of the observed lessons the instruction was limited to reproducing facts and the potential for developing second order concepts was not abundantly used.

One risk with the academic rational discourse of RE that one-sidedly takes the generalized and intellectual concepts as a starting point could be that learning becomes too abstract, doesn't relate at all to anything in the students' experience, and thereby becomes distanced and dissociated to any personal understanding, and that students for this reason had difficulties in relating to the teaching content of RE.

9. Concluding discussion

The classroom practice reflects in many ways the society of which it is a part, and traces of societal discussions and dilemmas are clearly discernible in the classroom practice. However, the different school subjects frame the discussion in a certain way, and discourses in a Math or English-classroom will differ from the RE-classroom. The aim of this study has been to examine and analyse how Religious Education (RE) can be socially constructed in the classroom practice in the contemporary, pluralistic context of Sweden. This has been done through analyses of teachers' and students' articulations in relation to RE-lessons in order to understand what discourses of religion, religions and worldviews might be articulated in the context of RE in the classroom practice. The analysis has focused on the discourses and how they are articulated, and I will in this final chapter discuss the possible implications of these discourses in relation to the construction of the subject.

First, a summary of the results will be presented and thereafter a discussion of relations between the discourses and how different concepts emerged in different discourses. Difficulties and aspects of analysing a subject in practice will be elaborated upon as well as didaktik implications¹⁰⁹ of the discourses for the RE practice.

Summary of the results

Even if the educational system at some ways can be seen as inflexible, conservative and difficult to change, education and school subjects are marked by the times of which they are part. Just as Swedish society has undergone major changes in the last century, so has the subject of RE in Sweden. From being a confessional orientation in Christianity, the subject today is non-confessional and greatly influenced by notions of secularism prevalent in Swedish society. This thesis concerns the social construction of RE in the classroom practice. All classrooms were different and there were a myriad of processes at play.

¹⁰⁹ As mentioned in the introduction and section on theoretical approaches, the German/Swedish word *didaktik* instead of the English word *didactics* is used to underscore the broader educational approach of the concept. See also footnote 39.

Nonetheless, three discourses of religion, religions and worldviews were discernible in all of the RE-classrooms – a secularist one, a spiritual one and a Swedishness discourse. Also two educational discourses were noted: a private one and an academic rational discourse that affected how RE was constructed in the classroom practice.

A secularist discourse was hegemonic during the lessons and implied that religion was something out-dated and belonging to history before science had provided humankind with reliable answers. A non-religious, atheistic position was articulated as a neutral and unbiased position in relation to the subject matter and was associated with being a rational, critically thinking person. Individualism and making individual rational choices were articulated as superior values in relation to different aspects of religion.

This discourse was, however, at some points challenged through other ways of talking about religion, which in some respects included features that can be labelled spiritual. In the classrooms existential questions about continuation of life after death, the meaning of life, and articulations about the existence of “something greater” were articulated. When this spiritual discourse was at play, the articulations were of a less certain kind and had the character of explorative discussions. Being “religious”, or being part of a religious tradition that is considered one of the world religions, was linked to articulations of oppression and submitting to irrational rules. Spirituality, on the other hand, was associated with private religiosity and personal choices, to finding an authentic self and aspects of something divine inside oneself. In this sense the spiritual discourse was perfectly compatible with the individualism of the secularist discourse. The spiritual discourse challenged the secularist discourse in the sense that a spiritual dimension – a continuation of life after death or the possible existence of some kind of supra-empirical energy or being – was articulated as possible components of a personal worldview.

Articulations of Sweden as a Christian country also challenged the secularist discourse to some extent. In the Swedishness discourse, Swedishness was linked to the Christian history of Sweden and Christian traditions and values. This discourse was activated when defining a “we” in relation to “the Other”, not when talking about personal beliefs.

The programs offered by the upper secondary schools were influenced by different educational discourses, which affected the construction of the subject in these different contexts. Some classrooms were marked by articulations of a more private character whereas some were dominated by a discourse that has

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

been labelled academic rational. The classroom practice in vocational programs was to a greater extent dominated by the private discourse and the academic rational discourse more often influenced the classroom practice at programs that are preparatory for higher education. The private discourse resulted in a lower level of abstraction where the students had less practice in using analytical concepts. The RE-practice in this context was also more focused on reproducing facts than explorative analytical discussions, which were more prevalent on programs that were preparatory for higher education. Thus, the private discourse contributed to the construction of RE as more characterised by personal opinions and surface facts compared to the academic rational discourse. The way meaning was proffered, that is, the offer of meaning (Englund, 1997) in the classroom practice thus differed between vocational programs and programs that were preparatory for higher education where the student to a much greater extent were able to practice their analytical abilities and apply central concepts.

How the teaching was organised tended to initiate different discourses. Through instruction structuring the content religion-by-religion, the secularist discourse tended to come into play and dominate the classroom conversation, in contrast to when a thematic approach was used. The results of the observations indicate that when the secularist discourse was dominating the classroom practice, this entailed difficulties in reaching the aims of the subject concerning diversity and tolerance, as stated in the curricula; furthermore this discourse also hindered the students from developing a nuanced understanding of the RE-content.

Discourses of religion, religions and worldviews

When entering the classrooms and conducting participant observations, I did not know what discourses of religion, religions and worldviews would be articulated in the RE-practice. Early on during the observation period I was struck by how strong the articulations of a secularist character were in the classroom and how this way of talking dominated the RE-classroom. The analyses of the transcribed audio files showed that the secularist discourse was hegemonic and the dominating discourse of religion, religions and worldviews in all classrooms. A secularist way of approaching the subject content was perceived as a natural and objective approach to the subject. However, a

discourse, even a hegemonic one, is always a partial and temporary fixation of meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). As have been shown, other discourses that in some respect challenged the hegemonic secularist discourse also occurred in the RE-classrooms. Still, these discourses had to operate within a framework of the secularist discourse.

What view of religion, religions and worldviews emerged in the classrooms? In the formulations in the syllabus where it is stated that the teaching “should aim at helping students broaden, deepen and develop knowledge of religions, outlooks on life and ethics” (Skolverket 2011a), complexities and difficulties of the concepts of religion and worldviews (outlooks on life) are not apparent. Largely absent in the RE practice were aspects of religion that can be described as “lived religion” (see for example Ammermann, 2013; McGuire, 2008). The very concept of religion as referring to first and foremost texts and dogmas rather than religion as practice and materiality reflects a Western, historically Protestant, view of religion. As this perspective has dominated the scientific study of religion, it is not surprising that this particularistic view of religion is articulated in the classrooms. This view of religion can thus be seen in light of the secularist discourse, which appropriated concepts such as neutrality, objectivity, rationality, and modernity. Simultaneously, this view of religion can be seen as part of a national Swedish discourse where religion is attributed to a limited part of life and first and foremost concerns institutions and cognitive aspects such as institutionalised, defined beliefs and dogmas (cf. Excerpt 97).

There was an on-going discursive struggle over concepts such as religion and Christianity. In the secularist discourse, religion and Christianity had connotations of oppression and submission. Admittedly, religion in the spiritual discourse was constructed as opposite to spirituality, which had connotations of a milder, personal and more individualistic form of religiosity. But religion, as constructed by the spiritual discourse, was also associated with the quest for meaning and in this sense something genuinely human. Christianity too was given different meanings – in the secularist discourse Christianity was seen as one among the world religions and consequently had the same negative connotations as any religion. However, in the Swedishness discourse, Christianity was associated with Swedishness, Swedish traditions, and history. In this context, Christianity was articulated as an example of a religion associated with individualistic secularist values.

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Individualism

The analysis shows that individualism in the classroom practice emerged as a superior value, which everybody had to relate to regardless of discourse. To be seen as an individualistic, conscious, rational acting subject was articulated as central. This was, for example, shown through negotiations of the voluntary nature of religious acts within Islam (Excerpt 25) or articulations about Sweden as secular and privately religious (Excerpt 29). Individualism was not only articulated as a core value within the secularist discourse, but also in the spiritual discourse. When this discourse was at play, the individual was at the centre, and spirituality was associated with finding and affirming a true, authentic, inner self. In the spiritual sphere, individual choices and autonomy were constructed in contrast to religiosity, which was associated with blind obedience and subordination. In the spiritual discourse, the divine was articulated in terms of a force, power or energy, which admittedly might affect the individual, but cannot control or punish him or her, as could a “traditional religious God”.

Articulations related to individualism operated in slightly different ways in the private discourse compared to the academic rational discourse. In the private discourse, individualism was articulated in terms of more student-oriented instruction and there occurred first-person articulations, such as “I think”, and “I am a Muslim”. In the academic rational discourse, more prevalent in programs that were preparatory for higher education, making individual, independent choices regarding all kinds of topics was an absolutely essential value. The students rarely articulated their personal position regarding any religious tradition but used articulations in the third-person, which gave the conversation a more general character. It is, however, worth noting that it was possible to articulate positions in the first person if these were related to atheism, even in programs that were preparatory for higher education, and this can be seen as a sign of the hegemony of the secularist discourse.

Individualism was strongly linked to perceptions of Swedishness. To the degree Swedishness and religiosity were related, it was subordinated to individualism. Christianity was accepted as long as it could be characterized as individualistic (cf. Excerpt 38). Swedishness also seems to be a central value in the RE-classroom, and although it was associated with individualism it can still be described in terms of a collective and shared identity, which is why the link to individualism is to some extent inconsistent. This paradox is commonly cited in literature describing Sweden (see for example Berggren & Trägårdh, 2006). “Swedishness” and “Swedish mentality” are for example characterised as

strong, private individualism accompanied by public collectivism and a constant quest for consensus together with a strong belief in the state as a guarantor of individual freedom and equality. Individualism and the simultaneous pursuit of consensus had implications for how to talk about Swedishness and religion in the classroom. Nationalism has had a remarkable ability to unite people and get them to ignore personal, social and economic (and religious?) differences. But nationalism is by nature also distinctive – people who are not perceived as part of the nation (regardless of the grounds on which the nation's sense of community is built) are inevitably “the Other”. The foundation of nationalism is “us” and “them”. When the nationalist discourse was at play in the classrooms, articulations of religious positions were rather linked to identity than to religious beliefs. Through the othering of certain groups, a more coherent “we” emerged.

“Something-ism”

In the two classes where students were asked to formulate their own worldview and what and how they thought regardless of whether they identified with one of the world religions or not, a few students clearly identified with some of the world religions. The largest groups formulated positions that included a spiritual dimension, a “belief in something”. This “something-ism” is recognized in research and rather than a belief in a personal God/Gods, it implies vague, non-committal articulations of beliefs in some supernatural transcendent being and therefore something easier to reconcile with individualism than traditional religions. “Something-ism” is in some ways already the biggest “religion” in northern Europe (Margry, 2012). This is consistent with the picture conveyed in the student essays and to some extent the classroom discussions. That so many students in their written essays articulated a position of “something-ism” that can be described as spiritual but did not by far articulate this to the same extent can be seen as a sign of the hegemony of the secularist discourse.

All the discourses, except to some extent the private discourse, excluded religious subject-positions. Despite the fact that the secularist discourse encompassed notions of freedom of thought and the existence of many parallel truths, a religious subject-position was associated with strongly negative connotations. A relativistic approach towards truth-claims in general was frequently articulated (see for example Excerpts 3 and 4), but the dismissal of religiously related perspectives was articulated as false in absolute terms. The understanding of the concept of religion was based on the perception of

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

religion that is related to religion as an institution, texts and dogmas, not religion as lived practices, this contributed to the exclusion of religious subject-positions (cf. McGuire, 2008). However, a discursive construction of a subject-position containing a personal worldview seemed to be a possible position in the RE practice regardless of discourse. These personal worldviews might include views that could be described as spiritual or religious. How can this be understood? One possible reason might be that notions of a personal worldview opened up for the existence of parallel and divergent interpretations of life. In the classroom, demands of consistency and coherence of a personal worldview seemed to be lower than for an organised religious worldview, and the personal worldviews were not examined in the same critical way. The way a personal worldview was described in the classroom, it was perfectly compatible with individualism and thus a possible position, even if it in individual cases might include ontological positions beyond the secularist non-religious realm.

Representations of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism

RE instruction should, according to the Swedish syllabus, be non-confessional and neutral in relation to the different religions and worldviews. However, as revealed in Chapters 5-8, different religions were represented in different ways in the classroom. This has been shown in the empirical chapters and I will here summarize images of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism in relation to the secularist, spiritual and Swedishness discourses as interesting features of the way these religions emerged in the empirical material of the thesis.

Within the secularist discourse, Christians were articulated as “they”, and Christianity described as a negative worldview (Excerpt 65). In small-group discussions students who positioned themselves as Christians expressed the opinion that they saw themselves as a minority group in a secular culture (Cf Moulin, 2011, 2015). These students articulated that they had no problem with meeting and respecting atheists, but that they felt that they were not always encountered with the same respect. When Christianity was constructed in relation to Islam, Christianity appeared rational and Western, but in relation to the secularist discourse Christianity became one of many religions and an example of something obsolete and irrational. Christianity and Islam were partly constructed in relation to each other where Christianity became modern while Islam was seen as retained in a past time. Islam was about submitting to religious (irrational) rules, which was not consistent with individualism. In conjunction

with the teaching of Islam, Lars Vilks's roundabout dogs¹¹⁰ and the Mohammed cartoons were discussed in the classrooms, and this became in many ways just another example of Muslims (over)reacting, being irrational and strange. Islam was thus in the classrooms often represented by extreme groups, not moderate liberal groups (cf. Otterbeck, 2005). Buddhism, on the other hand, was articulated as perfectly compatible with the secularist discourse and it was stressed that there is no God in Buddhism, which was held up as positive and more "rational". Buddhism in the RE classrooms seemed in many respects to be a sensible "feel-good-philosophy" consistent with an individualistic approach. Buddhism is, as one of the students articulated (Excerpt 15): "Be nice! Don't 'kill anybody! There is no God and no... Yeah, stupid fucking holy war".

When the spiritual discourse was at play, spirituality and religiosity were articulated as utterly separate. Islam was never referred to in relation to any spiritual dimension, while Buddhism *was* spirituality, not religion. However, it was a rather abstract kind of Buddhism that was articulated, the idea of Buddhism, not so much related to knowledge and facts about Buddhist practices and doctrines (cf. Thurfjell, 2013). When Christianity was the subject of conversation, the discussions sometimes tended to move towards existential issues, which can be seen as related to the spiritual discourse, and this was the case more frequently in relation to Christianity compared to when other religions were discussed.

The analysis shows that the kind of Christianity that was constructed in relation to the swedishness discourse was a Christianity related to history and tradition but not a Christianity that "stands out" (see for example Excerpt 85), but was created as something different from the "dangerous" Islam. Christianity, unlike Islam, was described as something that does not pervade one's entire life, but is a separate part of life. In the classroom it was articulated that "they" must adapt to "us", and in this sense Islam was constructed as something different from what is Swedish. That God in Islam is described as merciful and a peacemaker was a fact that had difficulty "reaching" students, partly due to the fact that there were no counter-images presented in relation

¹¹⁰ In 2007 the artist Lars Vilks presented cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in the guise of a "roundabout dog", a kind of street installation in Sweden. This led to both international and national reactions and a heated debate about freedom of speech in relation to respect for religious believers. In the debate, the intentions of this "art" were questioned. For a discussion of Lars Vilks's "art" that relates his activities to increasing islamophobia in Europe, see for example Malm (2011).

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

to the mainstream media image of Islam that associated Islam with suicide bombers and terrorism (cf. von der Lippe, 2009). Buddhism was not seen as “typically Swedish” but was however associated with certain values such as tolerance and respect; thus it became easier to incorporate.

Social constructions of a subject in practice

As a practice is always unfixed and changeable one can ask whether it is possible to describe the construction of a subject through analysing the classroom practice, which in this study has been considered a discursive practice. Nevertheless, or maybe because of the shifting character, I argue that it is important to look into the classrooms and not avoid processes and complexities of the classroom practice as this is where the actual education takes place.

A classroom practice is constantly shifting – students act, say different things, instruction relates to different themes, teachers use various strategies to awaken students’ interest, trying to fulfil their expectations and challenge their earlier understanding (Deng & Luke, 2008; Englund, 1997). Despite the wide variation in what takes place in the different classrooms from lesson to lesson, is it still possible to talk about construction of a school subject in this unfixed changing practice? I argue that it is possible to talk about RE as a specific practice. The same discourses recur in different classrooms and are articulated by different people in somewhat different ways but with similar meaning. To compare with a vocational practice where a certain vocational jargon (i.e. discourse), recurs, the subject frames the articulations in similar ways. For example, we hold that there are certain discourses characterising a given profession, a vocational practice. This does not mean that all aspects of the vocational jargon/discourse are constantly in use, sometimes other discourses come to the fore. Nevertheless, it is possible to maintain a certain vocational practice as characterized by certain discourses (Billett, 2011; Granér, 2004), so also the RE practice. The study was carried out in the shift where one syllabus (Skolverket, 2006) was phased out and replaced by a new (Skolverket, 2011a). Only two of the classes followed the new syllabus, and how the new syllabus affects the RE classroom practice needs to be studied further. From the result of this study, there were however no apparent differences in the classroom practice in classes who studied according to respective syllabus. When asked, the teachers emphasised the similarities between the new and the previous syllabus and concluded that they could continue the teaching the way they used

to. This can be seen as an argument for the importance for researcher entering the classroom to gain understanding of construction of schoolsubjects.

However, is it possible to turn this around and argue that these discourses also construct practice? Ongstad (2012) maintains that the process moves in both ways. All articulations within a school subject are influenced by “structuring forms of communication” at the macro level, which he describes as the potential meaning of articulations. How this is articulated in the classroom affects the way the discourses are interpreted and understood. The RE practice can thus be seen as social and communicative actions within a discursive practice (cf. Ongstad, 2012). How the subject is understood, or how the “offer of meaning” (Englund, 1997) is perceived is dependent on both the text (content) and the context i.e. the perceived content in a specific context, and who creates the premises for meaning making. In this sense the discourses articulated in the RE classroom can be seen as constructing the subject.

Students' understanding and expectations influence what happens in the classroom. One feature that makes RE to some extent special is that some students have a personal relationship to the subject, regardless if this involves a religious or a non-religious position. Today, many students have no personal relationships to religious traditions (i.e. the subject content). However, sometimes during the observations the students related to religions and worldviews *as if it might be possible* to have a personal relation to the content, the possible choice of becoming an insider of a religion. This might contribute to students expressing opinions out of a personal conviction and a personal worldview, even if they articulate the opinion in the third person and in generalist terms as in the academic rational discourse.

The subject is non-confessional and derives its content from the academic discipline of Religious Studies, and in this respect has the outsider perspective. Regardless this, the insider's (i.e. emic) perspective on beliefs, practices, religions and worldviews are just as important if aims related to understanding of worldviews held by other human beings, and as stated in the syllabus (Skolverket 2000a, 2011a), are to be reached. In the lessons the students were sometimes encouraged to reflect on how they perceived the RE-content on a personal level. Put differently, in the subject there are possibilities for relating to themes linked to interpretations of life and might thus be linked to the process of identity construction. Therefore the “offer of meaning” in RE might include meaning-making at another level compared to several other school subjects. This can also be seen in relation to the debate within the RE field of

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

learning in, learning about and learning from (Grimmitt, 1987; Teece, 2010) and notions of reflexivity and edification (Jackson, 2009). Reflexivity within RE can be defined as “...the relationship between the experience of researcher/students and the experience of those whose way of life they are attempting to interpret” (Jackson, 2009, p. 25). Reflexivity therefore concerns one’s own understanding in relation to new knowledge. Jackson points out that RE is not just about learning about others, but also learning about oneself and traditions the students are part of. The worldviews of the students become a factor in the understanding and interpretation of a religious tradition. Reflexivity is also about reflecting upon the content of the instruction and in a detached manner, critically examining various religious practices. This competence is central to a multi-religious society, where respect for differences and being able to obtain different perspectives are important and part of intercultural education and learning. To reflect upon one’s own learning process is also part of what Jackson (2009) describes as *edification*.¹¹¹ In this sense all genuine learning involves learning about and learning from – new knowledge gives new insights and perspectives and might be an opportunity for reorientation. And in this respect RE is just like any other subject.

Another aspect related to the contingency of the subject and RE as an “offer of meaning” is linked to the private discourse and the focus on reproducing facts. The students analytical abilities, stressed in the syllabus, were neglected in classrooms where the private discourse dominated and the students did not get to practice and thereby develop their cognitive skills and analytical abilities. This result can be seen in relation to studies analysing other subjects (Andersson Varga, 2014; Korp, 2006; Norlund, 2009). Another problem with a one-sided focus on “surface facts” might be that the students’ knowledge becomes shallow and a poor base for understanding and analysing aspects of religion, religions and worldviews in different contexts. If religion is reduced to trivial facts the subject does not enhance understanding of what religion might mean,

¹¹¹ Jacksson (1997) argues even though there are similarities in the way Grimmitt uses learning in/about/from and the concept of edification there are differences in how they view religion as a coherent system of beliefs and the way that Grimmitt sees learning as an overall aim for all students. In the context of non-confessional RE in Sweden, which includes both religious and non-religious worldviews, I would, however, suggest a more neutral definition of the concept of edification – you can learn important things about the world and yourself through studying worldviews, regardless of whether you strongly dislike them or not. In this sense, you can both learn about but also from the teaching of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism as well as the teaching of Satanism, Nazism and destructive sects.

neither in society nor in a person's life, which is stated as a goal of RE in the syllabus.

Didaktik implications for the RE practice

Due to secularity and increasing societal diversity, RE is found in the midst of the field of tension and questions of freedom of religion vs. secularity, monoculturality vs. multiculturalism and questions of how to create homogeneity in heterogeneity, about tolerance and neutrality.

Constructs of “we” and “the Other”

The school has historically been and still is the one institution that contributes to the construction of an imagined mono-cultural society (Carlsson & Rabo, 2007; Mansourim 2015; Tesfahuney, 1999). The school thus reproduces and maintains opinions and discourses perceived as normality and truth. The secularist discourse was hegemonic in the RE classroom, which meant that positions perceived to be outside that norm appeared as abnormal and deviant. When the secularist discourse became hegemonic, religion and faith were associated with out-dated irrational and unintelligent attitudes. This discourse in combination with the national discourse, contributed to the othering of religious people in general and Muslim people in particular. The Swedishness discourse was admittedly linked to a Christian history and traditions rather than beliefs, but above all this discourse was a discourse where Swedishness was defined by talking about features incompatible with Swedishness. To be “extreme”, to have a faith that affects everyday activities or that was visible in the public space, were all perceived as un-Swedish – religion could possibly be accepted as long as it was kept within the limits of what was perceived as “moderate”. In principle and in the name of tolerance, religious minorities were accepted but deviation from the majority norm was not accepted (cf. Otterbeck & Hallin, 2010).

Hall (2005) emphasizes identity construction as something contextual (rather than something historical), and in a global world there emerge boundaries between “us” and “other”. There was a strong tendency towards creating a “we” in the classroom. This predisposition might be part of human nature and identity processes are created in terms of binary opposites, in closeness and distance, me and you, and us and them. The question is how this “we” is constructed and in relation to what and to whom? (cf. Danielsson

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Malmros, 2012) A “we-and-them mentality” in which “we” was characterized by an identity based on anti-Muslimness, rather than on a Christian identity was discernible in the classrooms of this study (cf. Malm, 2011). Sweden has been a nation where the relationship between ethnicity and nationality officially has been identical. The construction of Sweden as homogeneous and mono-cultural has been maintained, not least through the school system, teaching, textbooks, literature and media (Carlsson & Rabo, 2007; Ehn et al., 1993; Lahdenperä, 2001; Larsson, 2006; Tesfahuney, 1999).

In the syllabus for RE it is stated that “They [the students] should be given the opportunity to reflect upon and analyse people's values and beliefs, and thus develop respect and understanding for different ways of thinking and living” (Skolverket 2011a). Based on the observations I conducted and analysed, it is my argument that in the Swedish RE-practice, talking about religion and about individuals, who consider themselves and/or are considered by others, as part of a religious tradition, in the way it was done, impedes an understanding of people of various religious worldviews and of social phenomena related to religion. Through an unreflective approach to these discourses, RE can, in a worst-case scenario, contribute to creating, reproducing and maintaining stigmatizing beliefs about people with different backgrounds and thus contribute to segregation and intolerance. Dealing with this stereotyping of “others”, I maintain, is one major challenge for RE (cf. ter Avest et al., 2009). If the secularist discourse and othering of those with religious beliefs becomes dominant in the RE classroom, this has consequences both for individual students and society, and is also problematic from a didaktik of RE perspective, as the objectives formulated in the syllabus are not reached.

There is much written about RE as a meeting place for students with different background as well as the subject's potential for creating social cohesion and contributing to tolerance and respect (Castelli, 2012; Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, & Willaime, 2007; O'Grady, 2009; Watson, 2011). I share the view that education in general and specific subjects, like RE, may function as a positive and integrating factor in the creation of a society characterized by tolerance and respect and a forum that might counteract prejudice and contribute to empathy. Still, classroom studies of RE highlight that the classroom practice in different ways tends to contain segments that do not contribute to a mutual understanding or respect for individuals (Buchardt, 2008; Eriksen, 2010; Osbeck & Lied, 2011), which is in line with the results of this study.

Managing diversity

The fact that the discourses identified in the empirical material of this thesis exist in the classrooms is not surprising as they are well documented in other contexts (cf. af Burén, 2015; Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Thurfjell, 2015). The Swedishness discourse and discourse of othering present in relation to RE is also recognized in other studies (see for example Buchardt, 2008, 2010; Eriksen, 2010). However, secularism in relation to the RE classroom is not studied in this way. In the classroom the secularist discourse was used as a way to manage diversity, as secularism was perceived to be a neutral perspective. In a society characterized by diversity, one needs to learn to manage differences. In secularism, religion has been made into something special, a special case. In this context I would like to highlight Taylor's (2011) proposal that we treat religion as "a difference among differences". In the debate on secularity, Taylor (2011) argues for a redefinition of a secularity that comprises how democratic societies deal with diversity. From this perspective, religious beliefs should be treated like any other beliefs that exist in the pluralistic contemporary society – no position, neither Christian, Muslim, atheist, religious or non-religious has "more right" to dominate than another. Religion should not be treated as a "special case" but as an idea among others, and Taylor (2011) stresses that it also applies to non-religious attitudes. In the classroom the secular discourse was sometimes used deliberately as a way to manage pluralism as it was perceived as a neutral position in relation to the subject content, to the variety of views and opinions that exist within the subject, but also in relation to students' personal experiences and perceptions. The secularist discourse become a way of dealing with pluralism in the classroom and the community. From Taylor's (2011) approach to secularity this is problematic, as this treats religion as a special case and not one opinion among others.

Schools are located in the intersection between public and private space. On the one hand, a school is a public sphere and part of the state that allocates resources and sets the framework in the form of school law, curriculum and syllabus. Meanwhile, the classrooms are populated by people, by teachers and students and the classrooms are part of their everyday life. The students are also expected to engage in learning which inevitably involves the student as a person. Freedom of religion must be an on-going process, where people meet and live together in spite of and because of similarities and differences. A secular, non-religious perspective is a relevant and legitimate perspective in non-confessional

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

integrative RE. But it is not a neutral perspective, which means that it might be problematic if it becomes hegemonic as it excludes other equally relevant and legitimate perspectives in the RE practice.

Whether Sweden ever was a homogenous country can be debated; however, today Sweden is indisputably a multicultural country in terms of background, language and religion.¹¹² The analysis of the empirical material showed that students on different programs were given different “offers of meaning” in RE. This difference in education is well documented in other subjects (see for example Andersson Varga, 2014; Korp, 2006; Norlund, 2009), and thus also visible in RE. These differences in teaching on vocational programs and programs that are preparatory for higher education are usually related to socioeconomic explanations and the educational level of parents is a distinguishing factor in the statistics (Skolverket, 2015a). In relation to RE and discourses of religion, one could imagine that ethnicity and religious background would have greater impact than academic and socioeconomic background. With the reservation that I have not systematically identified (due to ethical regulations of research) and analysed the background of the students, the results of the classroom observations from the various programs might indicate that the students' background in the form of social class had greater impact on how students talked about religion in the classroom than ethnicity or religious background. The private and academic rational discourses in the different programs can be seen in light of these aspects of diversity. Nor does it appear that gender seems to be a crucial factor for what discourses of religion, religions and worldviews that were articulated – the secularist, spiritual and Swedishness discourse occurred in all classrooms regardless of the gender composition of the different classes, but these aspects need further analysis.

So, is it possible to challenge and nuance the hegemonic secularist discourse so as to increase the opportunities for a more multifaceted understanding? After carrying out participant observation in different classrooms for more than a hundred lessons, it is my claim that just the awareness of and reflections about the fact that these discourses tend to dominate the classroom practice can contribute to teachers becoming able to nuance what is being said in the classroom, how the discourses are articulated in the classroom, and how various

¹¹² More than 21% (Statistics Sweden, 2015) of the population are born in another country or have two parents born in another country. And the number of persons and families where one parent was born in another country, or where a husband, wife, son-, daughter-, brother- or sister-in-law has a background from outside Sweden is indubitably considerably greater.

articulations can be perceived from different perspectives. In “an education of small gestures” (Bergdahl, 2010) it matters what is done in the classroom, what questions are asked, how these questions are formulated and how we see and relate to each other through glances, gestures and tone of voice. This is critical for how students can relate to questions about religion, democracy and diversity.

When the spiritual discourse was at play, the secularist discourse was nuanced, which permitted several different ways of talking about religion to coexist. By talking about religion as one among many worldviews it also became possible to speak about a spiritual dimension as part of some people’s worldview. Based on a psychological perspective, it was articulated that human beings by definition are interpretive and meaning making. In this interpretation process different people choose different ways and come to diverse conclusions. Hence, it became possible to understand that there exist different positions, spiritual, religious and non-religious.

Different ways of organizing teaching

It is worth noting that the way instruction was organized also activated different discourses. When teaching was organized based on religion- after-religion plus ethics it tended to activate the secularist discourse to a greater extent compared to a thematic organization based on themes and concepts. When every religion was treated separately, the focus was more often on facts about dogmas and texts.¹¹³ Although the same aspects of religions reappeared in the different religions, the comparative perspective was not very prominent, but every religion tended to be presented as a different “package” or object. Although many of the teachers stressed that they presented a “prototype” or simplified picture of the different world religions and that there were many different traditions within the broader tradition, etc., this still contributed to essentialization of religion and to making religion and believers strange and irrational as followers of this “package”, regardless of whether the essentialization was positive or negative (cf. Hylén, 2012). Because individualism was articulated as such a central value, any follower of any fixed “worldview-package”, religious, ideological or anything else appeared as a less

¹¹³ Generally the teaching contained origin and history, important persons, sacred texts, central beliefs and two or three main branches. Berglund (2014) points to the fact that this way of organizing the content of the teaching is strongly influenced by a Lutheran Protestant understanding of religion.

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

independent person. This way of presenting religions as (solely) dogmas and texts also reduced nuances and contributed to a more categorical approach in which the answers were right or wrong and where teaching content was assessed in terms of good or bad, true or false. All descriptions of reality must necessarily be simplifications of a complex, multidimensional and changing world. Generalizations are necessary, both to be able to communicate with other people about complex features, but also a condition for understanding and orientating oneself in life. The problems arise when we believe that these simplifications are the whole reality, that Catholicism “is” the seven sacraments and the doctrine of papal infallibility, or that we know what Islam “is” if we know Islam's five pillars and that Mohammed is the prophet and messenger of God. If the teaching of these facts is not related to historical, social and religious contexts and practices and in different ways made to involve questions about what the sacraments or pillars possibly can mean for different groups and individuals in different contexts, it is a kind of “offer of meaning” that does not to any great extent contribute to students' understanding and meaning making.

When organizing the teaching thematically, based on different themes and concepts and including personal worldviews and an life-question-approach, the spiritual discourse was activated to a higher degree compared to when the teaching was structured along world religions. In the thematic way of working, the explorative, tentative and reflective conversations were more frequent and RE in terms of an “offer of meaning making” was made more nuanced and multidimensional. This result can be seen as the backdrop of research emphasizing communicative aspects of the RE-classrooms and dialogue as a method and pedagogical tool (Castelli, 2012; Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004; van Eersel et al., 2010; Watson, 2011) or research of life-question pedagogy within RE (Hartman 1986a, 1994; Löfstedt, 2013). The secularist discourse tended to generate articulations of a definite character and the conversations became more of fixed statements than tentative dialogues. Osbeck and Lied (2011) argue that the way the classroom discourses are articulated, respectfully or mockingly, or whether the boundaries of religions and beliefs are defined as fixed or open, affects what is made possible to learn, and this study is in line with their result.

When teaching was organized thematically the comparative perspective was at the centre. The thematic teaching generated other types of comparisons, which contributed to making visible other and possibly additional aspects and nuances. I maintain, based on the observations of teaching and the students'

reasoning¹¹⁴ that thematic teaching or teaching based on concepts and questions of life compared to teaching based on the religion-by-religion organizing principle, has greater potential to develop students' conceptual understanding and capability to generalize, compare and identify similarities and differences between and within the different traditions. Put differently, teaching based on themes and concepts contributed to a greater extent to students developing second-order concepts and a scientific language (Vygotskij, 1975[1972]) or a vertical discourse (Bernstein, 1999). Another advantage that one of the teachers in my study highlighted, was that students who saw themselves as part of a certain tradition perceived a comparative discussion of e.g. gender, death, or the sacred in various religious and non-religious traditions as less “intimidating and threatening” than when an entire religion was presented and then some students felt they had to explain and defend “their” religion. Criticism and discussions became more nuanced when it became clear that, for example, within the same religion there exist a number of different approaches and that there are both similarities and differences both between and within the different religious traditions and non-religious worldviews. If students are given the opportunity to reflect upon how they perceive different concepts and questions, it may become easier for students who do not have any personal religious experiences and reference points to understand and see similarities and differences between different religious and non-religious traditions and worldviews. At the same time, all choices have both advantages and disadvantages. An educational choice of this kind affects both the didaktik how-question but also questions of selection of content. Different ways of organizing teaching generate different knowledge, which inevitably means that some content must be deselected, and the teachers of this study expressed that they were unsure if the students got all the facts that traditionally provide the “canon” of RE. A risk with thematic teaching and learning based on concepts and life-questions that appeared during the observations was a tendency that the teaching instead became one-sidedly student-centred and that teaching was limited to the perspectives of the students, how they perceived e.g. holiness, forgiveness or myth. The perspectives and prior understanding of the students are important when many students lack the knowledge and experience of central religious concepts. However, just because students are given space to reflect upon how they

¹¹⁴ This assumption is based on my observations of the reasoning displayed by students in the classrooms. I have not tested the students' reasoning abilities in any systematic way.

9. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

understand concepts and questions of life, this does not mean that teaching cannot recognize the way the same concepts are perceived in different religious and non-religious worldviews. This aspect of teaching can be seen both against the background of life question-pedagogy (Hartman, 1986a, 1994; Löfstedt, 2013) but also as inspired by phenomenology of religion (Smart, 1969, 1977).

Irrespective of whether one chooses to organize teaching based on religion-religion plus an ethics section or from a phenomenological and/or life question-inspired lesson plan based on themes and concepts, it seems important to oscillate between an insider and an outsider's perspective. The teaching of all subjects, not least RE, aims at making the familiar strange and the strange familiar in order to broaden the understanding and to give the students new perspectives.

To be a teacher of Religious Education – a mission impossible?

Schools can be seen as a reflection of our time – dilemmas, difficulties and problems that exist in society are also found in the classroom, perhaps in an especially concentrated manner. In recent decades religion has emerged as an increasingly important factor in understanding social processes. Globalization and migration mean greater demands on knowledge and respect in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic society. Religious Education is centred in the intersection between the public and private spheres and a forum where the boundaries of religious freedom are explored, discussed and challenged. Religious Education can, from this perspective, be seen as situated in the eye of the storm, admittedly strongly influenced by the surrounding winds, but in a more moderate and sensible space with somewhat different conditions, compared to the public debate for discussing and problematizing these phenomena. Based on a given framework of democratic values and human rights, such as mutual respect, freedom of speech and freedom of religion, there are within RE opportunities to clarify different positions and discuss various aspects related religion. Much of the previous research drew attention to the importance of dialogue in relation to the RE classroom (Castelli, 2012; Osbeck & Lied, 2011; Schihalejev, 2009; Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004; van Eersel et al., 2010; Watson, 2011). Dialogue has primarily positive connotations and is seen as an end in itself and as a special form of communication that contributes to learning. Sometimes it is stated that the classroom needs to be a “safe space”

(cf Everington, 2015; ter Avest et al., 2009). Based on the observations, I share the view that students need to feel safe in order to face what is new and can be perceived as foreign and also dare to expose lack of knowledge. Meanwhile, a classroom must not be “too” safe. Dialogue is often presented in opposition to disagreement. I would emphasize that disagreement, in the sense of differing views about content, is an integral part of every classroom practice and can serve as a resource in teaching. Students' prior understanding needs to be challenged and problematized – otherwise no learning will take place. However, it is the teacher's task to ensure that students are not violated in the classroom practice and in this sense is a safe space and that there is tolerance for different views (cf. Skeie, 2009).

All the teachers in this study had the ambition to enhance their students' understanding of religion and religiosity. In their work they encountered different impediments, which they handled in different ways. An obstacle many of the teachers pointed to, was the time at the course's disposal. In about 30-40 hours during one semester or an academic year everything should be done – teaching about and reflecting upon different aspects and nuances of the religious traditions, non-religious worldviews and ethics, as well as assessment of this. Alongside this there are a variety of group processes, positioning and relationship building going on. Learning is a process that needs time.

The analysis also showed that the teachers in many cases did not follow up comments of a condescending nature. The reason for this might be that they simply did not hear the comments, or that they did not perceive them as problematic, or that they did not know how to deal with them. The results of this study point to the importance of teachers being aware of the discourses dominating the classroom practice in order to make various perspectives explicit, but also the significance of teachers' professional skills concerning how to enhance a constructive dialogue in the classroom. Teaching Religious Education might be difficult, as the task is multifaceted and includes complex considerations and compromises. It is, however, an extremely important job, and ultimately I perceive the work of all teachers, not least teachers of Religious Education, as “front workers” of democracy.

Svensk sammanfattning av studien

All utbildning kan ses som ett sätt att överföra kunskaper, men också normer och värderingar, till det uppväxande släktet. Skolan kan utifrån detta perspektiv betraktas som en arena för traditionsförmedling men också en institution som ska hantera och lösa olika samhälleliga problem. Religionskunskapsämnet¹¹⁵ har historiskt haft en central funktion när det gällt traditionsförmedling och normöverföring då ämnet ursprungligen handlade om ”det uppväxande släktets danande till christelige och gagnelige samhälls medlemmar” (SFS 1842:19 § 14). I takt med samhällsförändringar såsom globalisering, migration och sekularisering har emellertid också religionskunskapsämnet förändrats både när det gäller syfte och innehåll. Sedan 1960-talet¹¹⁶ är ämnet i Sverige ickekonfessionellt i bemärkelsen att innehållet ska vara neutralt och inte propagera för någon specifik trosinriktning, och ska behandla såväl världsreligioner som centrala icke-religiösa livsåskådningar och etik.

Den här avhandlingen handlar om ett skolämne i skärningspunkten för samhälleliga och många gånger omdebatterade frågor såsom mångfald, sekularisering, traditionsförmedling och religionsfrihet. Från att vara ett homogent kristet enhetssamhälle med ett folk, ett språk och en tro under en kung¹¹⁷ kan Sverige idag beskrivas som ett religiöst och kulturellt pluralistiskt och sekulariserat samhälle. Religionens roll har förändrats radikalt sedan enhetssamhällets dagar och spelar en allt mindre roll som samhällelig sammanhållande faktor. Däremot verkar de sekulariseringsteorier som förutspått religionens nära förestående försvinnande (se t.ex. Bruce, 1996) inte bli besannade och religionsvetenskaplig forskning talar snarare om religionens nya synlighet eller om det postsekulära samhället (Carlsson & Thalén, 2015;

¹¹⁵ Den engelska termen för religionskunskap är Religious Education, RE, och används för både konfessionell och ickekonfessionell religionsundervisning.

¹¹⁶ I samband med att den 9-åriga grundskolan införande 1962 skrevs ett objektivitetskrav in grundskolans kursplan för Kristendomskunskap och 1969 ändrades namnet till Religionskunskap. På gymnasiet finns skrivningar om ämnets objektivitet omnämnt på 1950-talet. Namnförändringen till Religionskunskap skedde i samband med implementeringen av 1965 års läroplan för gymnasiet.

¹¹⁷ Beskrivningen Sverige som ett kulturellt, språkligt och religiöst homogent enhetssamhälle måste ses i ljuset av den officiella propagandan då det var denna bild man från statligt håll ville framhålla. Det har inom det geografiska område som idag utgör Sverige alltid bott folk med olika språk och religion (Hazell, 2011; Svanberg & Tydén, 1999).

Cassanova, 2003; Davie, 2007; Sigurdson, 2009; Taylor, 2007). I beskrivningen av religionskunskapsämnets syfte återfinns ämnets dubbla uppdrag som traditionsförmedlare och som en förberedelse för att leva i ett samhälle som präglas av mångfald:

Kunskaper om samt förståelse för kristendomen och dess traditioner har särskild betydelse då denna tradition förvaltat den värdegrund som ligger till grund för det svenska samhället. Undervisningen ska ta sin utgångspunkt i en samhällssyn som präglas av öppenhet i fråga om livsstilar, livshållningar och människors olikheter samt ge eleverna möjlighet att utveckla en beredskap att förstå och leva i ett samhälle präglat av mångfald (Skolverket, 2011a).

Det svenska religionskunskapsämnet är till skillnad från religionskunskap i många andra länder ickekonfessionellt och elever undervisas tillsammans oavsett religiös eller ickereligiös bakgrund.¹¹⁸ Detta innebär att elever med vitt skilda uppfattningar om och relation till ämnets innehåll möts i klassrummet. Ett antagande i denna avhandling är att ämnet i religionskunskapsämnet i klassrumspraktiken präglas av denna mångfald av åsikter och erfarenheter bland elever och lärare.

Avhandlingen har en tvärdisciplinär ansats och hämtar referenspunkter från såväl religionsvetenskaplig som utbildningsvetenskaplig forskning och ska således ses som ett kunskapsbidrag till svensk och internationell religionsdidaktisk forskning om hur religionskunskapsämnet konstrueras i klassrumspraktiken.

Syfte och frågeställningar

Avhandlingens övergripande syfte är att undersöka och analysera hur religionskunskapsämnet kan konstrueras i klassrumspraktiken i dagens svenska pluralistiska samhälle. För att nå syftet har avhandlingsarbetet utgått från följande forskningsfrågor:

- Vilka diskurser om religion, religioner och livsåskådningar artikuleras i religionskunskapsklassrummet?
- Hur artikuleras de?
- Vilka implikationer har dessa diskurser för konstruktionen av religionskunskapsämnet?

¹¹⁸ I många andra länder grupperas eleverna upp utifrån religiös tillhörighet och undervisas i religionskunskap utifrån ”sin egen” tillhörighet. Den form av gemensam religionskunskap som förekommer i Sverige benämner Alberts (2007) som ”integrative Religious Education”.

Bakgrund

Studiens bakgrund består av två delar. Den första behandlar vad ett skolämne är utifrån olika perspektiv och i olika sammanhang samt religionskunskapsämnets utveckling i Sverige. Den andra delen utgörs av en beskrivning av forskning om det västerländska religiösa landskapet, hur ungdomar manövrerar och förhåller sig till frågor om religion samt en systematisk forskningsöversikt av internationella klassrumsstudier av religionskunskapsundervisning.

Den här avhandlingen rör konstruktionen av ett skolämne i klassrumspraktiken. Men vad är ett skolämne? Utgångspunkten är att alla skolämnena måste ses som sociala konstruktioner som formats genom historien av samhällseliga behov och intressen. Många av dagens skolämnena hämtar sitt innehåll från universitetsdisciplinerna, men även dessa är ett uttryck för ett av många möjliga sätt att organisera kunskap. Gränsdragningsfrågan om vad som ska innefattas i olika discipliner och vad som ska uteslutas har varit föremål för infekterade stridigheter, och lett till att nya discipliner och/eller underdiscipliner skapats (Englund, 1997; Goodson, 2005; Goodson & Marsh, 1996; Sandin & Säljö, 2006).

Skolämnena präglas även av olika syn på lärande och synen på utbildningens huvudsakliga syfte (Englund, 1986). I vissa skolämnena har debatten varit livlig om själva identiteten i ämnet.¹¹⁹ I religionskunskap har diskussionen om konstruktionen av ämnet i hög grad rört frågor om religionernas sanningsanspråk i förhållande till krav på objektivitet, pluralism, religionsfrihet, värderingsfrågor och livsfrågornas vara eller inte vara i ämnet.

Religionskunskap

Religionskunskap (Religious Education) visar stora variationer mellan länder både till innehåll, mål och form. Willaime (2007) menar att ämnets konstruktion kan ses som en indikator på hur relationen kyrka-stat och skola-religion ser ut i olika nationer. I länder där den nationella identiteten är nära sammanlänkad med en speciell religiös tradition finns det tydliga spår av detta i läroplan och kursplaner. Vid en översikt av religionsundervisning i Europa kan lite förenklat tre olika modeller för religionsundervisning urskiljas: ingen religionskunskap

¹¹⁹ Jmf t.ex. Malmgrens (1996) ämneskonceptioner i svenska: svenska som färdighetsämne, svenska som litteraturhistoriskt bildningsämne och svenska som erfarenhetspedagogiskt ämne.

alls, konfessionell religionskunskapsundervisning där eleverna separeras utifrån religionstillhörighet och ickekongfessionell religionskunskapsundervisning där elever blandas oavsett religiös/ickereligiös tillhörighet. Frankrike kan ses som ett exempel på den första modellen då det inte förekommer någon religionsundervisning alls inom det offentliga skolsystemet.¹²⁰ Den religionsundervisning franska elever erbjuds är istället kopplat till frivillig undervisning genom olika religiösa organisationer (Willaime, 2007). Även USA tillämpar denna modell i det offentliga skolsystemet. Konfessionell religionskunskap förekommer t.ex. i Belgien, Finland Italien Spanien Tyskland, Österrike m.fl. och eleverna grupperas utifrån religionstillhörighet och undervisas ofta av representanter för den egna religionen och kursplan och läromedel är avhängigt religiös inriktning. Den tredje modellen, ickekongfessionell religionskunskap förekommer t.ex. i Norge, Sverige England, Wales och Schweiz. I dessa länder sker religionsundervisningen tillsammans oavsett religions tillhörighet, och ämnet ska ge eleverna en neutral och objektiv bild av de olika religionerna (Björlin, 2006; Willaime, 2007).¹²¹

I den religionsdidaktiska debatten förekommer även en distinktion mellan religionsundervisning och lärande *i* religion, *om* religion och *från* religion (se t.ex. Grimmitt 1987). Den konfessionella undervisningen beskrivs som undervisning i religion, syftar till att stärka elevens religiösa och moraliska utveckling, ge eleverna kunskap om den egna religionens trosföreställningar, värderingar, traditioner och stärka den egna religiösa identiteten. Undervisning om religion behandlar religion utifrån en ickekongfessionell utgångspunkt och utgår från det akademiska ämnet religionsvetenskap. Trosföreställningar och religiösa uttrycksformer i olika religioner behandlas som ett av många uttryck för mänsklig aktivitet. Enligt Grimmitt (1987) inbegriper att lära från religioner undervisning som berör livsfrågor av existentiell karaktär och möjlighet för elever att själva reflektera över sina egna uppfattningar i förhållande till olika religioners olika svar på dessa frågor (Grimmitt, 1987; Teece, 2010). Samtidigt

¹²⁰ Däremot tas religion upp inom t.ex. historia som en av flera faktorer för att beskriva och förstå den historiska utvecklingen.

¹²¹ Detta är givetvis en förenkling då variationen inom dessa grupper är stora. I vissa länder, t.ex. Grekland, Cypern, Italien och Malta existerar bara religionskunskap i kristendom som alternativ men med möjlighet att bli befriad från ämnet. I andra länder såsom Polen, Slovakien och Litauen grupperas elever utifrån religionstillhörighet. I t.ex. Luxemburg, Belgiska Flandern, Tyskland, Österrike, Rumänien, Finland, Spanien delas eleverna upp utifrån religionstillhörighet, men det finns möjlighet att välja ett ickereligiöst "etiskt" alternativ och det varierar huruvida ämnet beskrivs som konfessionellt eller inte även om eleverna undervisas i grupper baserade på religionstillhörighet (The European Association for Education Law and Policy, 2015).

innebär ju allt lärande oavsett ämne att eleven får en förändrad och fördjupad förståelse vilket gör det svårt att skilja mellan att lära om och att lära från.

Religionskunskapsämnets framväxt i Sverige

Religionskunskapsämnets historia måste förstås i relation till utvecklingen i samhället i övrigt då politiska, sociala och religiösa förändringar har präglat ämnets utveckling. Religion och utbildning har genom Sveriges historia varit nära sammanlänkade, liksom statens och kyrkans utveckling. Kristnandet av det geografiska område som så småningom skulle komma att utgöra Sverige, inleddes på 800-talet. På 1500-talet såg Gustav Vasa möjligheterna i att använda sig av kyrkan i nationsbyggandet och genomdrev reformationen. År 1593 antogs den ”rena evangeliska lutherska” läran som den enda tillåtna religionen, och Luthers katekes blev en sammanhållande ideologi. När Sverige som land växte fram och nationalstaten konsoliderades framhöll den svenska staten, i likhet med andra europeiska stater, enheten mellan folk, språk och religion, detta ännu tydligare efter Westfaliska freden 1648. I protestantiska kyrkor har bibeln haft en framskjuten plats, och kyrkan uppmärksammade tidigt vikten av att befolkningen var läskunnig. I 1696 års kyrkolag fastslås att kyrkan har ansvar för befolkningens läskunnighet. Undervisningen av barn skulle skötas av föräldrar och husbönder och kyrkans skulle kontrollera utfallet. I diskussionerna om den allmänna utbildningen som fördes under 1800-talet framhöll liberaler bildningens och medborgarkunskapens betydelse för individ och samhälle, medan konservativa debattörer ansåg att det fanns risker med ett allmänt utbildningssystem. Lösningen och kompromissen resulterade i att kristendomen fick en framträdande roll i den nya folkskolan, prästen blev ordförande i skolrådet och ett av folkskolans syften var att förbereda eleverna för nattvardsläsning (Algotsson, 1975; Falkevall, 2010; Hartman, 2000; Osbeck, 2006).

I takt med samhällsliga förändringar såsom urbanisering, industrialisering och demokratisering och folkligt engagemang i arbetarrörelsen, väckelserörelsen och nykterhetsrörelsen blev det svenska samhället under 1800-talet allt mer differentierat. I och med konventikelplakatets formella upphävande 1858 ökade religionsfriheten i den bemärkelsen att det blev tillåtet att fira gudstjänst i andra sammanhang än i Svenska kyrkans regi. Inom arbetarrörelsen och frikyrkorörelsen motsatte sig föräldrar att deras barn skulle undervisas i svenska kyrkans lära i form av Luthers katekes. Vägen till pluralism

och valfrihet påverkades stort av väckelserörelsernas inflytande (Gerle, 2007). Kritiken resulterade i en kompromiss där ämnet i folkskolan 1919 bytte namn från *Biblisk historia och katekes* till *Kristendom* och ämnet i läroverken bytte namn från *Kristendom* till *Kristendoms-kunskap*. Undervisningen i katekesen avskaffades i folkskolan och undervisningen fick mer formen av generell kristendoms-kunskap, och inte lika tydligt konfessionell dopundervisning som tidigare. Ämnet fick således en mer allmän kristen karaktär för att föräldrar till elever med olika kristen bakgrund skulle kunna acceptera undervisningen. Almén (2000) menar att staten i detta läge när den religiösa enheten gått förlorad valde att prioritera skolan som sammanhållande faktor och att detta var en viktig del i utvecklandet av den svenska modellen.

Religionsfrihet i bemärkelsen att svenska medborgare kan gå ur svenska kyrkan utan att gå in i ett annat samfund tillkom inte förrän 1952, och det tog nästan 20 år efter det innan kristendomsundervisningen avskaffades. När de konfessionella inslagen tonades ner på gymnasiet framhövdes istället ämnets personlighetdanande karaktär. I 1946 års skolkommissons betänkande, som också citeras i Kungliga skolöverstyrelsens förslag till provisorisk gymnasiereform 1952, slås fast att:

Kristendomsämnet bör mer än de flesta andra ämnen kunna vara ett instrument för den personlighetsdanning, som är skolans väsentligaste uppgift. Undervisningen i detta ämne bör ge eleverna att på grund av insikt om frågornas allvar och livsavgörande betydelse och på grund av egna erfarenheter och egen läggning bygga upp en personlig livsåskådning (Ecklestiastikdepartementet, 1948 s. 38).

År 1962 infördes den allmänna grundskolan i Sverige, och den (medborgar) fostrande rollen togs över av samhällskunskapsämnet. I religionskunskap infördes ett objektivitetskrav, och då kom undervisningen för första gången handla om religion, till skillnad från tidigare då undervisningen kan beskrivas som i religion.

I 1965 års läroplan för gymnasiet och 1969 års läroplan för grundskolan bytte ämnet namn till *religionskunskap* och fick minskad undervisningstid. Etik och livsfrågor fördes in i ämnet. Enligt Hartman (2009) var den största skillnaden i 1969 års läroplan jämfört med äldre läroplaner sättet att närma sig religion i skolans värld. Istället för att ensidigt fokusera på studiet av urkunder och yttre religiösa uttryck betonades att elevernas egna erfarenheter och existentiella funderingar skulle utgöra centrala utgångspunkter för undervisningen. Under hela utbildningsväsendets historia har pendeln svängt

mellan polerna undervisning som främst består av förmedling av traditioner och stoffinnehåll och undervisning som sätter eleven, personlighetsutveckling och demokratisk fostran i centrum. Under 70-talet blev "livsfrågepedagogiken" ett dominerande förhållningssätt inom religionskunskapsämnet. Hartman (2009) menar att med hjälp av denna pedagogik, som utgick från elevernas egna livsfrågor, kunde lärarna hantera religionskunskapens stoffinnehåll samtidigt som de uppfyllde objektivitetskravet och lärarna kunde därmed "... individualisera bort den objektivitetskramp som fanns i många klassrum" (Hartman, 2009). Den svenska religionskunskapen kom med Grimmits (1987) terminologi att innefatta både lärande om och från religioner, men inte i. Olivestam (2006) beskriver att utvecklingen av ämnet under 1900-talet gått från individfostrande och samhällsbevarande till att bli individfrigörande och samhällsspeglade. Religionskunskapsämnet i Lpo 94 (Skolverket, 2000b) och Lpf 94 (Skolverket, 2000a) beskriver han som individpåverkande och samhällsutvecklande då etiken och relationen individ-samhälle fick en mer framträdande plats (Olivestam, 2006). I den nu gällande kursplanen (Skolverket, 2011d) och ämnesplanen (Skolverket 2011a) har livsfrågeperspektivet tonats ner till förmån för ett mer samhällsanalytiskt perspektiv.

Sammanfattningsvis kan utvecklingen av religionskunskapsämnet beskrivas från att ha varit ren undervisning i den protestantiska tron till undervisning i kristendom (1919), studiet av kristendom (1962), studiet av religion (1969) för att landa i undervisning om tro och livsåskådningsfrågor (1980, 1994). Willaime (2007) framhåller att religionsundervisningen i den svenska skolan utgör ett bra exempel på hur sekulariseringen fått en allt större utbredning i ett land, och kanske även bidragit till den.

Tidigare forskning

I avsnittet om tidigare forskning presenteras en översikt om det religiösa landskapet i Sverige och Europa med fokus på forskning om hur unga människor förhåller sig till religion, sekularitet och mångfald. Variationerna inom ungdomsgenerationen är enormt stora. Det är också stor skillnad mellan hur ungdomarna resonerar om sin egen tro jämfört med religion i allmänhet. Religion verkar inte vara något som europeiska ungdomar talar om med sina kompisar, och de hämtar mycket av informationen om religion via media.

Fokus i denna avhandling är konstruktionen av religionskunskapsämnet i klassrumspraktiken varför forskningsöversikten främst inriktas på forskning

om religionskunskapsundervisning. För att få förståelse för hur kunskapsläget ser ut inom fältet har en systematisk forskningsöversikt genomförts via sökmotorn EBSCOhost med sökorden *Religious Education* och *classroom**. Detta genererade 129 artiklar och 32 av dessa visade sig vara empiriska klassrumsstudier. Det är intressant i sig att endast 32 av artiklarna kan betecknas som empiriska klassrumsstudier – ett stort antal av artiklarna diskuterar klassrumspraktiken, hur den borde se ut, aspekter som lärare bör inkludera och ha med sig när de går in i klassrummet, olika modeller för undervisning osv, men det är alltså vanligare att dessa rekommendationer eller åsikter är teoretiska diskussioner än slutsatser från empiriska studier.

Resultatet av den systematiska forskningsöversikten struktureras utifrån dessa innehållsliga teman: *Lärande, Dialog, Mening, Identitet* och *Implikationer av konfessionell/ickekonfessionell religionskunskap*.

I denna forskningsöversikt är det tydligt att frågor om hur man inom ramen för Religious Education hanterar frågor om mångfald och pluralism och frågor om konstruktionen av ett ”vi” i relation till ”den andre” utifrån olika utgångspunkter är centrala teman inom forskningen oavsett om studierna gjorts inom ramen för konfessionell eller icke-konfessionell Religious Education. Frågor om meningsskapande, elevcentrering/innehållcentrering och dialogens betydelse är också av stor vikt.

Teoretiska utgångspunkter

Avhandlingens övergripande syfte rör hur ett skolämne, i det här fallet religionskunskap, konstrueras i klassrumspraktiken. Då avhandlingen kan beskrivas som en religionsdidaktisk studie innebär det att den akademiskt hör hemma i två vetenskapliga fält, det religionsvetenskapliga och det utbildningsvetenskapliga. Ontologiskt kan den placeras i det poststrukturalistiska fältet och talet i klassrummet har analyserats med hjälp av diskursanalytiska begrepp (Howarth, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Diskurser kan beskrivas som ett specifikt sätt att tala om och förstå olika företeelser och som premierar vissa positioner men försvårar andra. Diskurser ses som ett sätt att konstruera mening och handlar om hur språk används i denna process. Det finns en mängd olika diskursanalytiska ansatser, men det gemensamma är att de alla ser språket som centralt för konstruktion av mening. Meningen är avhängigt sammanhanget och samma ord får olika mening i olika

diskurser (Wetherell et al., 2001b). Därmed ses verkligheten som diskursivt konstruerad. Detta innebär inte att allt *är* språk, men att *all mening skapas genom språk*. Utifrån detta perspektiv finns inga ”neutrala” positioner, utan alla beskrivningar av verkligheten är ett uttryck för ett specifikt perspektiv. Centrala diskursanalytiska begrepp som använts för att analysera elevers och lärares tal är diskurs, artikulation, artikulationskluster, diskursiv kamp, flytande signifikanter och hegemoni (Howarth, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Frågan om vad ett skolämne är eller kan vara och hur ett skolämne formas i praktiken har varit närvarande under hela forskningsprocessen. Klassrummet och ämnet ses i den här studien som en specifik diskursiv praktik som påverkar det som yttras. Det verkar råda samstämmighet att det är problematiskt att beskriva skolämnen som en förenklad variant av universitetsämnet även om många skolämnen har sina rötter i olika universitetsdiscipliner (Deng & Luke, 2008; Englund, 1997; Goodson et al., 1998; Goodson & Marsh, 1996; Ongstad, 2012). Skolämnen måste förstås i ett sammanhang, att de är kommunikativa till sin karaktär och har som främsta mål att bibringa elever ny förståelse. Därför är det inte möjligt att prata om ett ”rent” ämnesinnehåll utan all ämneskunskap präglas av den kontext de yttras i. Jag vill beskriva religionsdidaktik som en del av religionsvetenskapen, men religionskunskap kan inte ses som en förenklad variant av religionsvetenskap. Det svenska religionskunskapsämnet delar religionsvetenskapens ambition att analysera och förklara religion som ett socialt och samhälleligt fenomen. Men religionskunskapen, som är ett obligatoriskt ämne både i grundskola och gymnasieskola, syftar dessutom till att öka förståelse och tolerans för personer med olika bakgrund och förbereda elever för att leva i ett samhälle som präglas av pluralism.

Att ämnen betraktas som diskursiva praktiker innebär också att skolämnen uppfattas som kontingenta. Ett skolämne påverkas av historiska och sociala faktorer och av den ”moderdisciplin” universitetsämnet kan beskrivas som. Att skolämnen uppfattas som kontingenta innebär att det inte råder någon enkel korrelation mellan t.ex. läroplanen och läroböcker och hur ämnet ”blir” i olika sammanhang (Englund, 1997, 2004b; Laclau & Mouffe 2001). Konstruktionen av ämnet ses som ett en process där ämnesinnehåll, elever och lärare samspekar (Hopmann, 1997, Kansanen, 2000, Schoenfeld, 2012).

Metod

För att nå studiens frågeställningar och syfte har deltagande observationer av religionskunskapslektioner använts och studien har en etnografisk ansats (Atkinson et al., 2007). Green och Bloome (1996) skiljer på etnografi *i* eller *om* utbildning: En typ av utbildningsetnografi väljer skolmiljön som en av flera möjliga miljöer för att studera hur olika grupper upplever eller relaterar till olika sociala fenomen. Andra studier använder sig av etnografi som metod för att beskriva ett specifikt fenomen i utbildningssammanhang, och den här studien kan med denna terminologi beskrivas som en etnografisk studie om utbildning. Genom att vara i klassrummet och höra hur och om vad lärare och elever diskuterar och resonerar när det står religionskunskap på schemat blir det möjligt att förstå hur ämnet ”blir” i praktiken.

De deltagande observationerna har genomförts på tre större kommunala skolor med mellan 1100-1700 elever på studieförberedande program och yrkesprogram. Jag tillbringade 5-6 veckor på varje skola under läsåret 2011-2012 och följde 13 lärare fördelade på 24 olika klasser (se *Appendix 3*). Under fältarbetet fördes kontinuerliga fältanteckningar med intryck, reflektioner och frågor som skrevs rent varje dag. Undervisningen i form av föreläsningar och diskussioner både i helklass och i mindre grupper spelades in på ljudfil vilka sedan transkriberades. Även visst material i form av t.ex. textutdrag, uppgifter, prov och examinationer samlades in vilka tillsammans med de transkriberade klassrumsobservationerna och fältanteckningarna utgör underlag för studiens resultat.

Resultat

För att förstå hur religionskunskapsämnet konstrueras i klassrumspraktiken har jag sökt identifiera, beskriva och analysera de diskurser om religion som förekom i religionskunskapsklassrummen. Jag har sökt efter ”sprickor och skärningspunkter” i de olika sätten att tala, dvs. efter tecken som fixerats på ett annat och kanske motsägelsefulla sätt. Avhandlingens resultat presenteras i fyra kapitel där de tre första (kapitel 5-7) framförallt fokuserar på de diskurser som dominerar klassrummet, det vill säga mer på *vad*, innehållet i diskurserna. Det fjärde empirikapitlet (kapitel 8) analyserar två utbildningsdiskurser som präglade konstruktionen av religionskunskapsämnet i olika klassrumspraktiker, och detta har således mer fokus på *hur* diskurserna artikulerades. Nedan följer en sammanfattning av empirikapitlens resultat.

En sekularistisk diskurs

I kapitel 5 beskrivs och analyseras den första av de tre diskurserna om religion som framträdde i religionskunskapsklassrummet. Denna diskurs benämns en sekularistisk diskurs och den byggs upp genom artikulationsklustrena: *Prime time of history*, *Diversity of views*, *A neutral position*, *Criticism of religion*, *Science and faith*, *Individualism*, *Modern myths*, *Man is the measure of all things* och *Religion as a private matter*.

När denna diskurs var i spel framträdde en ”kronocentrisk” syn på historien och tiden, vilket innebar beskrivningar om att mänskligheten nu, mer eller mindre, nått sin fulländning. Religiositet förknippades med en förfluten tid när människor inte visste bättre men detta stadie har vi numera passerat. Människor som trots allt ser sig som en del av olika religiösa traditioner talades det om som att de levde kvar i en förgången tid. Religion kanske fyllde en funktion under tidigare historiska perioder, men moderna människor behöver inte religion längre. En aspekt av det moderna samhället är en mångfald av uppfattningar – att vi lever i en värld där det existerar många olika uppfattningar sida vid sida presenterades som ett faktum i klassrumsdiskursen. I relation till vad som beskrevs som religioners exklusiva sanningsanspråk artikulerades företeelser som mångfald och pluralism som problematiska för religiösa människor. Religiositet och religiösa individer associerades med intolerans medan ickereligiösa positioner förknippades med öppenhet och tolerans.

Att inta en ickereligiös position framställdes som en neutral position i förhållande till religion och att vara ”neutral” eller ”objektiv” hade positiva konnotationer. Att positionera sig som ateist i helklassdiskussioner var långt vanligare än att inta en religiös position trots att det i varje klassrum satt elever som i smågruppsdiskussioner positionerade sig som troende inom olika religiösa traditioner. Ateism artikulerades som en neutral position, men även som ”att vara normal”. Normalitet konstrueras i opposition till dess motsats, vilket i en sekularistisk diskurs är religiositet.

I den svenska skolan är kritiskt tänkande en förmåga som framhålls som central, och detta ska genomsyra alla ämnen. Detta var tydligt under observationerna och lärarna framhöll vikten av att inta ett kritiskt förhållningssätt till alla typer av livsåskådningar och sanningsanspråk. Ibland försköts emellertid innebörden i begreppet ”kritiskt granska” till att ”kritisera”. Ett sätt som den typen av kritik framfördes på var genom skämt med en

tämligen föraktfull underton eller att framställa troende människor som ointelligenta, psykiskt sjuka och galna. Flera elever uttryckte också att det inte var tillåtet att kritisera religioner för att man då blev anklagad för att vara rasist.

Vetenskap och religion var ett ämnesområde som togs upp i många klassrum. Detta ämnesområde berörde dels evolutionsteoretiska och perceptionspsykologiska förklaringsmodeller till uppkomsten av religion och religiösa föreställningar, men även ontologiska och epistemologiska frågeställningar – vad är möjligt att veta? Kan det finnas flera parallella sanningar? Är människans handlingar enbart styrda av kemiska signalsubstanser? Det var tydligt att hur diskussionen introducerades påverkade den diskursiva kampen. I klassrum där diskussionen hade karaktären av ett utforskande undersökande samtal fixerades inte betydelsen av artikulationen utan flera olika artikulationer förekom sida vid sida.

Individualism var ett oerhört centralt värde i samtliga klassrum. Att göra sina egna val, att framstå som en rationell och självständig individ hade positiva konnotationer och artikulerades som extremt viktigt av både lärare och elever. Religioner och att vara religiös förknippades med att blint och oreflekterat följa kollektiva och irrationella regler varför individualism artikulerades som svårförenligt med religiositet. Om samtalet rörde religiositet i allmänhet framställdes religiositet som individualismens motpol, men i samtal om olika religioner beskrevs vissa religioner som mer svårförenliga med individualism än andra. Buddhismen stod ut som en religion där individen väljer själv med ett minimum av regler medan islam associerades med begrepp som underkastelse och blind lydnad. Ett exempel på individualismen som överordnat värde var att elever som själva positionerade sig inom den muslimska traditionen framhöll frivilligheten i att t.ex. fasta, besöka moskén och att be. Många elever uttryckte vikten av att göra sina egna val. Även om det ibland kunde vara svårt framställdes detta som ett exempel på att man var en stark självständig individ, till skillnad från religiösa människor som inte valde själv utan bara frågade vad Gud ville att han eller hon skulle göra. Det artikulerades en stark motvilja mot att ”köpa ett helt paket”.

I några av klassrummen försökte lärarna göra jämförelser mellan religiösa myter som fungerat som tolkningsramar för människor under tidigare perioder och de myter och berättelser som dominerar i dagens Sverige. Myter som dominerar dagens samhälle uttrycktes i klassrummet röra konsumtion, skönhet, lycka och individen som centrum. Till skillnad från en diskurs om religion som inte utesluter förekomsten av någon högre makt utanför människan, är

människan i en sekularistisk diskurs alltings mått och den som avgör om något är rätt eller fel, gott eller ont, sant eller falskt. Etik är ett ämnesområde inom religionskunskapen. I ett av klassrummen hänvisades till de mänskliga rättigheterna som en referenspunkt och i ett klassrum nämndes den gyllene regeln som en etisk princip som förekommer i alla religioner, men vid diskussioner om etiska frågor förekom inga referenser till något annat än det egna tyckandet – något är gott eller rätt för att vi tycker det och för att vi har bestämt att det ska vara så just nu i vårt samhälle. Förintelsen, folkmordet i Rwanda och Breiviks massaker på Utöja artikulades som uttryck för absolut ondska och i klassrummen förkom diskussioner om individens ansvar för både egna handlingar och samhällsutvecklingen.

En annan aspekt av den sekularistiska diskursen var att religion är en privatsak som inte borde förekomma i det offentliga rummet. Här uppstod en intressant motsättning – klassrummet kan uppfattas som en offentlig plats men samtidigt förväntades eleverna tala om religion och religiositet vilket enligt en sekularistisk diskurs är en privat angelägenhet som man bör hålla för sig själv. Ett diskursanalytiskt antagande är att då en diskurs dominerar utesluts andra möjliga sätt att tala. Ett exempel på den sekularistiska diskursens dominans är att det var extremt ovanligt att tala om sig själv som troende i första person, speciellt när det gällde kristendom. Istället dominerade uttryck såsom ”religiösa människor är övertygade om...”, ”kristna tycker att...” ”muslimer tror...”, ”vi i Sverige är...” osv. Endast en gång under de 125 lektioner jag var närvarande uttryckte en person att hon var kristen, och detta gjordes i halvklass med 8 elever närvarande. Detta trots att det i samtliga klassrum fanns elever som i mindre grupper och privata samtal berättade att de tillhörde olika kyrkor, var konfirmationsledare eller på andra sätt var engagerade i olika kristna organisationer. Däremot förekom det att muslimska elever talade om sig själva som muslimer. Att undvika att påverkas av religion var centralt för många elever, och religiös påverkan och religiösa symboler artikulades som mer ”kraftfulla” eller ”värre” än andra former av påverkan, t.ex. i form av kommersiella symboler.

En andlig diskurs

I det empiriska materialet refererade elever och lärare ibland till en verklighet bortom förnuftet och en dimension av tillvaron som handlade om något som kan beskrivas som ”ultimate concern” (Tillich, 1965), om människans

existentiella villkor och möjligheten att det skulle kunna existera någon form av över-empiriskt fenomen eller dimension inte utesluts. Detta sätt att tala om religion har jag valt att kalla en andlig diskurs. Denna diskurs byggdes upp genom artikulationsklustrena: *A spiritual dimension, A personal interpretation of life, What is man, Concepts with religious roots – Holiness and Sin and forgiveness* och *Your time on earth*.

Begreppen andlighet och religiositet kan beskrivas som flytande signifikanter och laddades med olika mening i olika diskurser. Religiositet förknippades företrädesvis med tro på specifika dogmer och underkastelse av religiösa regler och ritualer. Även andlighet kunde associeras med religiositet, men i vissa sammanhang associerades däremot andlighet med frivillighet och bejakande av den egna personen. Att tro på ”något större”, något övernaturligt eller tala om en andlig dimension i tillvaron var däremot accepterat så länge denna tro på ”något” inte uppfattades som del av en organiserad religiös tradition. En av klasserna fick till uppgift att beskriva sin egen livsåskådning och jämföra med en annan persons livsåskådning. I denna klass var det flera elever och lärare som i klassrumsdiskussioner positionerade sig som ateister, och den sekularistiska diskursen dominerade klassrumstalet. Vid analys av elevernas skriftliga texter beskriver sig emellertid 17 av 22 som troende på något som kan beskrivas som en andlig dimension. Andlighet förknippades också med privatreligiositet väl förenlig med individualismen som var ett överordnat begrepp även i denna diskurs.

När den andliga diskursen var i spel beskrevs människan (i bestämd form singular) i termer av meningsskapande och meningssökande. Att söka efter svar på eviga frågor och efter mening framställdes som något genuint mänskligt och som människor i alla tider och i alla samhällen ägnat sig åt. I denna jakt på mening återfinns religion och religiositet. I flera av klassrummen återkom diskussioner om vad det innebär att vara människa, om människan har en själ och vad det i så fall innebär.

Lärarna uttryckte att många elever saknade kunskap om religiösa fakta (som t.ex. de fem pelarna, de sju sakramenten och den åttafaldiga vägen) varför de la ner ganska mycket tid på att förklara den typen av fakta. Ofta resulterade denna typ av faktareproduktion i att en sekularistisk diskurs aktiverades – att följa religiösa påbud och regler framstod som obegripligt och irrationellt. En del lärare försökte dock att inte enbart stanna vid reproduktion av fakta och arbetade medvetet med begreppsförståelse för begrepp med religiösa rötter. I

klassrummet diskuterades hur dessa kan förstås utifrån olika perspektiv. Som exempel kan nämnas begreppet helig. När läraren frågade eleverna vad begreppet helig innebär associerades det i första hand till religiositet, att något är heligt för en troende. En elev menade att begreppet inte sa henne någonting. Men efterhand började eleverna berätta om saker som de själva uppfattade som heliga i bemärkelsen okränkbara och oerhört viktiga såsom nära relationer, viktiga personliga platser och föremål osv. Genom detta sätt att arbeta med begrepp, som kan beskrivas som religiösa, nyanserades hur olika fenomen, platser och saker kan vara viktiga för olika människor.

I religionskunskapsklassrummet diskuterades existentiella villkor såsom att ingen har bett om att få födas, vi bara finns och att det enda vi med säkerhet vet om framtiden är att vi någon gång ska dö, att livet är ändligt. Att tala om livet och döden på det här sättet öppnade upp för flera alternativa tolkningar och funderingar kring vad som händer när man dör. I samband med dessa diskussioner uttryckte flera elever att de trodde att då livet var slut så var det slut. Men många uttryckte även uppfattningen att livet på något sätt fortsätter, man ville åtminstone inte utesluta den möjligheten. När den andliga diskursen var i spel var svaren mindre tvärsäkra, mer utforskande och öppna för olika svar, och religiösa livsåskådningars svar avfärdades inte lika kategoriskt. Även elever som i klassrummet beskrev sig som ateister kunde säga att de tilltalades av reinkarnationstanken eller att de uppfattade livet på något sätt som något kontinuerligt.

En svenskhetsdiskurs

I kapitel 7 visas hur föreställningar om svenskhet i religionskunskapsklassrummet kopplades till föreställningar om Sverige som ett kristet land. Dessa föreställningar hade inte så mycket med religion eller religiositet att göra utan artikulerades som ett sätt att särskilja ett vi i relation till det som uppfattades som annorlunda och främmande. Svenskhetsdiskursen byggdes upp genom artikulationsklustren: *Sweden as a Christian country; Alienation and threat, "We have Santa Claus" – holidays, religion and culture, "In Sweden we are secular, individualistic and tolerant"* och *"Like worshiping Mickey Mouse" - othering of the religious.*

Samtidigt som Sverige refererades till som "det mest sekulära landet i världen" var också en vanlig artikulation: "Sverige är ett kristet land". På vissa sätt

utmanade detta sätt att tala den sekularistiska diskursen, men på andra sätt förstärkte det den. Det är emellertid slående att talet om svenskhet associerat med kristendom bestod av delvis motsägelsefulla artikuleringar. Till exempel menade en elev att landet Sverige måste beskrivas som kristet, även om man ser sig själv som ateist så lever man ändå i ett kristet land. Vad detta innebar var dock inte helt klart. Kristna värderingar nämndes vid många tillfällen i många klassrum som något som särskiljande för svenskhet, men vad dess värden skulle innehålla eller hur dessa skiljde sig från andra religiösa traditioners värden formulerades aldrig.

I klassrummet uppkom diskussion om vem som är att betrakta som kristen. I många klassrum artikuleringar kristendom som relaterat till trosföreställningar. Att vara döpt och konfirmerad och kanske till och med medlem i svenska kyrkan var inte avgörande för om man skulle beskrivas som kristen eller inte. En av lärarna menade dock att benämningen kristen kan betraktas som en kulturell etikett och att man därmed t.ex. kan vara kristen och ateist samtidigt.

Många elever artikuleringar att de inte identifierade sig med någon specifik religiös tradition och visste inte riktigt hur de skulle förhålla sig till religiositet då de saknade personliga erfarenheter av religion eller vad religiositet kunde innebära för en enskild person. I mötet med andra vars religiositet uppfattades som självklar och stark upplevdes detta ibland som ett hot. Samtidigt som religion på många sätt associerades med den ”etniska andre” uttryckte många en vilshenhet – vad är då det svenska? Har det med kristendom att göra? Hur då? Det var tydligt att den religiositet som associerades med svenskhet inte hade något med extremism att göra. Människor i andra religiösa traditioner uppfattades som ”mer religiösa” och därmed som något hotfullt.

Ett sätt som svenskhet tydligt var förknippat med kristna traditioner var när traditioner och högtider, framförallt julfirande diskuterades. Att fira jul hade ingenting med religion att göra utan talades om som en svensk tradition. När lärarna påtalade julens religiösa rötter ledde detta till upprörda kommentarer, framförallt då läraren påtalade att adventsljusstakens förlaga är den judiska minoran. I religionskunskapsklassrummen utgick samtalet från att alla firade jul och formuleringar om ”varför vi firar jul” var vanligt förekommande. En del elever reagerade på denna formulering då de inte kände sig inkluderade i detta ”vi” då de av olika skäl inte firade jul.

I klassrummet talades ofta om svenskhet i termer av individualism, rationalism, tolerans, respekt och öppenhet för olika sätt att leva. När man försökte beskriva vilken typ av religiositet som kunde betraktas som svensk var

den starkt präglad av dessa värden. Så länge religiositet underordnades eller var förenlig med dessa värden och man ”var som alla andra” beskrevs denna typ av religiositet som oproblematiserad.

Det kollektiva ”viet” i klassrummet positionerades sällan som religiöst, men viss religiositet och religiösa praktiker var mer associerade med annorlunda och ”den Andre”. När religion och kristendom konstruerades i relation till den sekularistiska diskursen fick dessa andra konnotationer jämfört med om religion och kristendom konstruerades i relation till Islam och multikulturalism. Ofta talades det om religiösa som ”dom”, som om det inte satt några troende i klassrummen. Många gånger talades det om troende som ”konstiga”, ”galna”, ”lurade” och ”ointelligenta”, att ”dom” är annorlunda jämfört med ”oss”, att ”vi” har svårt att förstå hur ”dom” tänker då ”våra” trosföreställningar inte alls liknar ”deras”. På detta sätt konstruerades en specifik typ av svenskhet förknippad med luthersk kristendom trots att ett starkt avståndstagande artikulerades gentemot att se på sig själv som religiös eller troende.

All religiositet artikulerades som något främmande, men Islam var mer främmande än andra religioner. I samtliga klassrum där undervisning om islam förkom nämndes att islam betyder underkastelse. Detta ord hade negativa konnotationer i ett sammanhang där individualism och de egna individuella valen är centrala värden. Den starkt negativa media-bilden av Islam som associerad med extremism och terrorism var också något som diskuterades i samtliga klassrum och något alla förhöll sig till vare sig man uppfattade den som korrekt eller inte. Trots att lärarna strävade efter att nyansera bilden av islam och t.ex. nämnde att islam betyder fred eller frid och att några av Guds många namn inom islam är *Den barmhärtige*, *Den välgörande*, *Den oändligt gode* och *Den mest nåderike* så hade dessa epitet svårt att få genomslag i klassrumsdiskussionen då den negativa bilden av islam var så stark och dessa ord inte relaterades till konkreta exempel.

En privat och en akademiskt rationell diskurs

En utgångspunkt i den här avhandlingen är att ämneskonstruktion ses som något som händer i klassrumspraktiken i samspel mellan elever, lärare och innehåll och att ämnet betraktas som kontingent (Englund 1997). De tre tidigare empirikapitlen behandlar diskursernas innehåll, *vad* som artikuleras, medan det fjärde empirikapitlet mer fokuserar på *hur* det artikuleras i olika sammanhang. Dock bör det påpekas att vad och hur inte är möjligt att helt separera – ett

innehåll måste alltid artikuleras på något sätt, och hur något sägs är avgörande för hur innehållet uppfattas. Under observationerna var det slående att olika sätt att tala dominerade i olika klassrum, vilket påverkade konstruktionen av religionskunskapsämnet i klassrumspraktiken. I en del klassrum hade samtalen en mer privat och informell ton när det gällde alla möjliga ämnen. Jag har valt att benämna detta sätt att tala en privat diskurs. Således är det som i detta kapitel refereras till som en privat diskurs ett privat (i vissa bemärkelser personligt) sätt att tala, hos både lärare och elever vilket genererade en privat inramning av ämnet. Det här sättet att tala framträdde i kontrast till en mer formell skolorienterad och akademisk diskurs vilket har benämnts en akademisk rationell diskurs. Analysen av ljudfilerna visar att båda diskurserna förekom på både yrkesprogram och studieförberedande program, men att den privata diskursen dominerade på yrkesprogram medan den akademiskt rationella var mer förekommande i klassrumspraktiken på studieförberedande program. Den privata diskursen byggdes runt artikulationsklustrena: *Me, myself and I – articulations in first person, Emotional articulations, Reproducing facts, Professionalism through the student-teacher relationship* och *Only to pass*. Den akademiskt rationella diskursen konstureades genom artikulationsklustren: *All human beings – articulations in third person, Analysing, Professionalism through academic knowledge*, och *Only to get high grades*. De två diskurserna presenterades emellertid parallellt.

Jämfört med studieförberedande program präglades yrkesprogrammen av ett mer privat förhållningssätt både när det gällde diskussioner av ämnesrelaterad karaktär, men även när det gällde samtal i klassrummet om andra saker. Elever på yrkesprogram talade i högre utsträckning om sig själva i första person t.ex. i form av ”jag tycker...”, ”jag är...”, jämfört med på studieförberedande program där uttrycken ”kristna tror...”, ”muslimer anser...”, ”en religiös position kan vara...” vilket innebar att artikulationerna fick en mer generell karaktär. Detta gällde även t.ex. när eleverna skulle jobba med olika företeelsen såsom t.ex. religiösa ritualer. I klassrum där den privata diskursen dominerade begränsades ofta undervisningen till att exemplifiera vad en religiös ritual kunde vara medan diskussionerna inom ramen för en akademisk rationell diskurs vände och vred på begreppet ritual och vilken funktion olika ritualer kan ha i olika sammanhang och för olika personer vilket genererade en djupare och mer nyanserad begreppsförståelse. Denna skillnad i undervisning på yrkesprogram och studieförberedande program och därmed förutsättningar för att utveckla

SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING AV STUDIEN

begreppsförståelse är väl belagd även i andra ämnen (se t.ex. Hjelmér, 2012; Kärnebro, 2013, Andersson Vargas, 2014).

På olika program råder olika sociala koder vilket var speciellt tydligt när det gällde företeelser som kan beskrivas som emotionella uttryck, vilka hade olika karaktär. Ett sätt som lärarna hanterade starka emotionella uttryck var att mer fokusera på fakta, vilket hade konsekvenser för vilka diskurser som aktiverades i olika kontexter. Ett sätt är att beskriva skillnaderna är i termer av en mer elevcentrerad undervisning i den privata diskursen jämfört med en mer innehållsorienterad undervisning på i den akademiskt rationella diskursen. Men samtidigt utgjorde fakta majoriteten av undervisningsinnehållet i klassrum där den privata diskursen dominerade och eleverna fick mindre möjlighet att diskutera och resonera på dessa program, vilket kan ses som en paradox. Under observationen förekom det ofta en tämligen hård jargong och skämt fungerade som ett sätt att positionera sig i klassrummet, men också som ett sätt markera avstånd till ämnesinnehållet. På yrkesprogram förekom också vid några tillfällen att elever hamnade i infekterade konflikter över ämnesinnehållet. Att då fokusera på fakta framstod som en lösning för att inte tappa kontrollen i klassrummet. Samtidigt ledde en ensidig fokusering på fakta, ofta i form av enskilt arbete med instuderingsfrågor, till en essentialistisk och endimensionell syn på religion som irrationella regler och ”konstiga” uppfattningar, och eleverna fick mindre hjälp med att utveckla sin analytiska förmåga och begreppsförståelse.

Lärarna använde sig av olika strategier för att erövra auktoritet i klassrummet. Där den privata diskursen dominerade involverade strategierna i högre grad relationsbyggande jämfört med att hävda auktoritet och legitimitet genom att referera till sin akademiska kunskap. Den senare strategin fungerade däremot bättre i klassrum där den akademiskt rationella diskursen var stark. På yrkesprogrammen uttryckte eleverna många gånger att de inte var intresserade av ämnet, men att de ville ”klara det” och blir ”godkända”, d.v.s. få minst ett G/E i betyg. I många klasser rådde en kultur av att det inte var riktigt accepterat att satsa på högre betyg, och man var nöjd med ett E (detta är givetvis en generalisering, och det förekom undantag). Det är möjligt att detta även bidrog till den privata, informella karaktären på samtalen i klassrummet – lärarna fick färre frågor rörande ämnesinnehållet och därmed uppmuntran från eleverna att utmana dem intellektuellt. Många lärare konstruerade uppgifterna så att de som nöjde sig med ett E kunde göra en typ av uppgifter och om de ville ha högre betyg fick de göra fler uppgifter.

På studieförberedande program var det inte problematiskt att få höga betyg, tvärt om. Efter det målrelaterade betygssystemets införande 1994 har lärare uppmuntrats att tydliggöra för eleverna vad som förväntas av dem för specifika betyg i form av kunskaper och förmågor. Lärarna delade ofta ut matriser med bedömningskriterier för olika uppgifter, och många gånger hade dessa karaktären av en checklista, vilket kan främja ett instrumentellt förhållningssätt till lärande och försvåra möjligheten att nå mål som handlar om förståelse och reflektion.

Den privata diskursen medförde således att ämnesinnehållet tenderade att fokusera på konkreta exempel och fakta medan ämnet i den akademiska rationella diskursen fick en mer analytisk och generell karaktär vilket möjliggjorde en mer utvecklad begrepps-förståelse.

Avslutande diskussion

I den avslutande diskussionen diskuteras relationen mellan diskurserna, hur ämnet kan förstås som socialt konstruerat i praktiken samt några av avhandlingens religionsdidaktiska implikationer. Analysen av diskurserna visade att den sekularistiska diskursen var hegemonisk i religionskunskapspraktiken. Trots att det vid sidan av denna diskurs existerade andra sätt att tala satta den sekularistiska diskursen ramarna för talet om religion, religioner och livsåskådningar i klassrumspraktiken. Den sekularistiska diskursen la beslag på begrepp såsom neutral, objektiv, relationell, modernitet och icke-religion. Den andliga diskursen kretsade kring andlighet, en personlig livsåskådning och eviga frågor. Den nationella svenskhetsdiskursen fokuserade begrepp såsom tradition, nationell identitet och den andre. Begreppet individualism var ett begrepp som förekom i samtliga diskurser och användes på ungefär samma sätt. Andra begrepp såsom t.ex. religion eller kristendom kan beskrivas som flytande signifikanter som laddades med olika mening i olika diskurser. Samtliga diskurser utom möjligtvis den privata diskursen uteslöt religiösa subjekt. Däremot uteslöts inte livsåskådnings-subjekt som artikulerades som mer individualistiskt och självständigt konstruerade. De undgick den kritik religiösa traditioner och organiserade livsåskådningar utsattes för och det ställdes inte samma krav på att en personlig livsåskådning skulle vara heltäckande och ontologiskt konsistent.

Olika religioner hade olika framtoning i de olika diskurserna. Inom ramen för den sekularistiska diskursen framstod kristendomen som en bland alla

världsreligioner och därmed lika irrationell och problematisk som vilken annan religion som helst och ett uttryck för något som uppfattades som främmande. Om kristendomen däremot jämfördes med islam, framstod kristendomen som västerländsk, mer rationell och förnuftig. Kristendomen ansågs kunna begränsas till en privat del av livet, till skillnad från islam som framställdes en allomfattande livsinställning och som inbegrep livets alla områden. Uttryck för en partikulär och lutersk religionsyn färgade således hur olika religioner uppfattades. Muslimer var ofta artikulerade i termer av ”dom”, och konstruerat som något osvenskt. Den negativa mediabilden av islam var något som alla, både elever med muslimsk bakgrund och elever med icke-muslimsk bakgrund, förhöll sig till. Trots att det i klassrummet slogs fast att islam betyder fred och frid och att några av namnen för Gud är *Den barmhärtige*, *Den oändligt gode*, *Fredens källa* m.fl. hade dessa epitet svårt att få genomslag i klassrummet då de mediabilderna hade så starkt genomslag. Till skillnad från islam beskrevs buddhismen som en ”snäll” religion, starkt förknippad med andlighet. Det underströks att det inte fanns någon gud i buddhismen och buddhismen framstod som en rationell ”måbra-filosofi”.

Religionskunskapsämnet beskrivs i den här avhandlingen som socialt konstruerat i klassrumspraktiken i samspel mellan elever, lärare och innehåll, och detta diskuteras i relation till läroplansteori (Englund, 1997; Ongstad, 2012). På många sätt liknar religionskunskapsämnet andra skolämnen. En skillnad som till viss del utmärker religionskunskapsämnet är att en del elever kan ha en personlig relation till ämnesinnehållet, oavsett om detta inbegriper religiösa eller icke-religiösa positioner. Många elever hade inte heller någon personlig erfarenhet eller relation till de religiösa traditioner som undervisningen behandlade. Däremot förekom det att eleverna relaterade till innehållet som om det *vore möjligt* att ha en personlig religion till innehållet dvs. som att det vore möjligt att bli del av de studerade traditionerna. Detta gjorde att eleverna många gånger tog ställning till ämnesinnehållet på ett personligt sätt, även om de uttryckte sig i generella termer och inte som ett personligt ställningstagande. Även om ämnet är ickekonfessionellt och hämtar sitt innehåll från religionsvetenskap som söker att beskriva religionerna genom ett analytiskt utifrån-perspektiv, så behöver även ett inifrån-perspektiv förekomma i undervisningen för att göra innehållet begripligt. Eleverna inbjöds i olika sammanhang att reflektera över sin egen livstolkning vilket kan ses som att undervisningen i termer av meningserbjudande hade tämligen existentiella

konnotationer, vilket kan ses som en skillnad jämfört med många andra skolämnen.

Utifrån avhandlingens resultat diskuteras religionsdidaktiska implikationer utifrån tre områden: *Konstruktionen av "vi" och "dom"*, *hantering av mångfald* och *olika sätt att organisera undervisning*. Då den sekularistiska diskursen var hegemonisk och uppfattades som det normala uppfattades icke-sekularistiska positioner som avvikande och onormala. I religionskunskapsklassrummet förkom många exempel på hur religiositet förknippades med något föråldrat, omodernt och ointelligent, men också osvenskt. Det fanns en stark strävan efter samförstånd och konsensus, att skapa ett "vi" i klassrummet. Det är möjligt att denna strävan och tendensen att tänka i binära motsatspar är genuint mänsklig, men ett "vi" förutsätter ett "dom" och frågan är vilka som definierades som "de andra"? Att i klassrummet hantera och motverka stereotypiseringen av "de andra" är ett av religionskunskapsämnets största utmaningar om det ska vara möjligt att nå mål som handlar om förståelse andra människors tankar och handlingar.

I klassrummet framstod en sekularistisk eller ateistisk position som neutral i relation till religiositet, till skillnad från en religiös position som uppfattades som ett partiskt förhållningssätt. I ett pluralistiskt samhälle ställs frågor om var gränsen för religionsfrihet ska dras i det offentliga rummet på sin spets. I detta sammanhang vill jag lyfta upp Taylors (2011) idé om att betrakta religion som "en skillnad bland skillnader" och inte som ett "specialfall" bland åsikter. Ingen position, kristen, muslimsk, ateistisk, religiös eller icke-religiös har större rätt att dominera än någon annan. Tillämpat i religionskunskapsklassrummet blir en ateistisk utgångspunkt legitim och relevant i förhållande till ämnesinnehållet, men det blir även religiösa utgångspunkter.

Skolan är situerad i skärningspunkten mellan det offentliga och det privata. Å ena sidan är skolan en offentlig plats som regleras av skollag och läroplan. Samtidigt som klassrummet ett offentligt rum, befolkas detta rum av lärare och elever som tillbringar sin arbetsdag och vardag där, och syftet är att eleverna ska vara engagerade i en lärprocess vilket ofrånkomligt är en personlig process. Religionsfrihet i det här sammanhanget blir en ständig förhandling, en pågående process där individer med olika bakgrund och uppfattningar möts och i bästa fall utvecklas tillsammans. Om den sekularistiska diskursen blir helt hegemonisk försvinner emellertid relevanta perspektiv i den här processen.

Pluralism och mångfald kan ses utifrån många olika perspektiv. Utifrån den här studiens resultat verkar det dock som att socioekonomiska faktorer och

SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING AV STUDIEN

olika skolkoder på olika gymnasieprogram har större betydelse för hur elever talar om religion i klassrummet än genus, religiös och/eller etnisk bakgrund, men detta behöver undersökas vidare.

Ett intressant resultat är att olika sätt att organisera undervisning ”triggade” olika diskurser. Det vanligast förekommande undervisningssättet var att gå igenom religion för religion och ha ett separat etikavsnitt. Undervisningen tenderade att presentera religionerna som separata paket eller objekt. Detta bidrog till att essentialisera religionerna och att kunskapen hade en kategorisk och absolut karaktär vilket innebar att nyanser och variationer inom de olika religiösa traditionerna tenderade att utelämnas. Att välja att vara en del av ett helt ”livsåskådningspaket” framstod som irrationellt då individualism var ett så centralt och överordnat värde. Några av lärarna organiserade emellertid undervisningen utifrån olika teman eller begrepp, och elevernas livstolkande utgjorde en del av kursen. När undervisningen organiserades tematiskt dominerade inte den sekularistiska och nationella svenskhets-diskursen på samma sätt och meningserbudandet blev mer mångfacetterat och nyanserat. I tematisk undervisning var komparativa perspektiv i centrum vilket skapade andra förutsättningar för begreppsutveckling hos eleverna. En annan fördel som en av lärarna framhöll var att elever som såg sig som del av en specifik religiös tradition inte kände sig lika ”hotade” eller ifrågasatta om samma företeelse inom olika traditioner belystes och diskuterades. I den tematiska undervisningen framträdde likheter och skillnader både mellan och inom olika religiösa och icke-religiösa traditioner och eleverna kände inte att de behövde stå som representanter eller försvara ”sin” religion då det blev tydligt att det fanns olika uppfattningar inom denna, men också likheter med andra religiösa traditioner. Men alla didaktiska val innebär både för- och nackdelar. Nackdelar kan till exempel vara att eleverna inte får med sig samma faktakunskaper om alla specifika religioner. En annan risk med detta undervisningssätt kan vara att undervisningen enbart fokuserar på elevernas egen föreställningsvärld och inte inkluderar andra, religiösa och ickereligiösa traditionernas perspektiv på de teman och begrepp som valts. Oavsett vilket undervisningssätt som tillämpas menar jag utifrån denna studies resultat att det är viktigt att i undervisningen pendla mellan ett utifrån och ett inifrån perspektiv, att göra det främmande familjärt och det familjära främmande.

Avslutning

Skolan kan ses som en spegelbild av samtiden – dilemman, svårigheter och problem som förekommer i samhället återfinns även i klassrummet, kanske på ett speciellt koncentrerat sätt. Religion har de senaste decennierna framträtt som en allt viktigare faktor för att förstå samhällliga processer. Den tilltagande migrationen innebär att det ställs större krav på kunskap och respekt i ett alltmer diversifierat och pluralistiskt samhälle. Religionskunskapen befinner sig mitt i skärningspunkten mellan det offentliga och privata och där gränserna för religionsfriheten undersöks, diskuteras och utmanas. Religionskunskapen kan utifrån detta perspektiv ses som en plats i stormens öga som visserligen starkt präglas av de omgivande stormvindarna men som utgör ett lugnare rum där något annorlunda förutsättningar för att diskutera och problematisera dessa företeelser kan förekomma. I religionskunskapsämnet finns möjlighet att klargöra olika positioner och dryfta olika aspekter relaterade till det som vi benämner religion utifrån givna ramar som handlar om demokratiska värden och mänskliga rättigheter såsom ömsesidig respekt, yttrandefrihet och religionsfrihet. Mycket av den tidigare forskningen uppmärksammade dialogens betydelse i relation till RE-klassrummet (Castelli, 2012; Osbeck & Lied, 2011; Schihalejev, 2009; Schweitzer & Boschki, 2004; van Eersel et al., 2010; Watson, 2011). Dialog har huvudsakligen positiva konnotationer och ses som ett självändamål och som en speciell form av kommunikation som bidrar till lärandet. Ibland talas det om att klassrummet ska utgöra ett ”safe space” (Everington, 2015; ter Avest et al., 2009). Jag delar den uppfattningen att eleverna måste vara trygga för att våga möta det som är nytt och kan uppfattas som främmande. Samtidigt får ett klassrum inte bli ”för” tryggt. Dialog framställs ofta i motsättning till konflikt som har negativa associationer. Dock vill jag framhålla att konflikt, i bemärkelsen olika uppfattningar om sakinnehåll, är en självklar del av klassrumspraktiken och kan utgöra en resurs i undervisningen. Elevers förförståelse måste utmanas och problematiseras - annars sker inget lärande. Däremot är det lärarens uppgift att se till att elever inte kränks i klassrumspraktiken och att det finns tolerans för olika uppfattningar (cf. Skeie, 2009).

Samtliga lärare i den här studien hade som ambition att deras elever skulle få en ökad förståelse för religion och religiositet. I sitt arbete uppstod olika problem som de hanterade på olika sätt. Ett konkret praktiskt hinder som medförde svårigheter att nå alla de mål som återfinns i kursplanen/ämnesplanen som många av lärarna tog upp var den tid som står

SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING AV STUDIEN

till kursens förfogande. På ca 30-40 timmar under en termin eller ett läsår ska allt hinnas med – undervisning om och reflektion över olika aspekter och nyanser av de religiösa traditionerna och ickereligiösa livsåskådningarna och etik, samt bedömning av detta. Samtidigt som det också är en mängd gruppprocesser, positioneringar och relationsskapande igång i klassrummet. Resultatet i den här studien pekar på betydelsen av att lärare är medvetna om vilka diskurser som dominerar i klassrummet och explicit-gör olika perspektiv. För att kunna göra detta behöver lärare besitta religionsdidaktiska kunskaper, vilket innefattar ämneskunskaper, didaktiska kunskaper om att leda grupper och skapa förutsättningar för samtal och dialog, men också kunskaper om eleverna och de kontexter de lever i. Att vara lärare i religionskunskap må vara svårt, då uppdraget är komplext och mångfacetterat och innebär ett stort mått av överväganden och kompromisser. Det är icke desto mindre ett extremt viktigt arbete och ytterst menar jag att alla lärare, inte minst lärare i religionskunskap är nyckelfigurer i arbetet för ett demokratiskt samhälle.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

The subject of Religious Education in Swedish Grammar Schools and Upper Secondary School 1807-2011			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Curricula or policy document</i>	<i>Name of the subject</i>	<i>Teaching-hours/week</i>
1807	The School order of 1807 [1807 års skolordning]	Christianity [Kristendom] including church history, morality and natural law	4-5
1828	The committee report of 1828 [1828 års kommittébetänkande]	Christianity [Kristendom]	5-6
1843	The school audits of 1843 (New elementary school) [1843 års skolrevision (nya ementarskolan)]	Christianity [Kristendom] including bible Greek	3
1856	The Grammar Schools Charter of 1856 [1856 års läroverksstadga]	Christianity [Kristendom]	2
1859	The Grammar Schools Charter of 1859 [1859 års läroverksstadga]	Christianity [Kristendom]	2
1873	The Grammar Schools Charter of 1873 [1873 års läroverksstadga (riksdagsbeslut)]	Christianity [Kristendom]	2
1878	The Grammar Schools Charter of 1878 [1878 års läroverksstadga]	Christianity [Kristendom]	2
1895	The teaching curriculum of 1895 [1895 års undervisningsplan]	Christianity [Kristendom]	2
1905	The New grammar schools Charter [Nya läroverksstadgan]	Christianity [Kristendom]	2
1928	The New Grammar School's Charter together with teaching plans [Nya läroverksstadgan jämte undervisningsplaner]	Knowledge of Christianity [Kristendoms-kunskap] Strong emphasis on the history of religion, Church history, knowledge of the Biblical narratives and the life of Jesus. Knowledge of the Eastern and the classic ancient religions. The teaching should take place "in a manner that promotes the disciples' religious and moral development".	2
1933	The Grammar School's Charter of 1933 [1933 års läroverksstadga]	Knowledge of Christianity [Kristendoms-kunskap] Instruction should "urge the disciples to serious reflection on religious and ethical issues, impart a deeper insight into the history of Christianity and its faith and belief, and in connection therewith a more thorough knowledge of foreign religions"	2
1940	The Board of Education report of 1940 [1940 års skolutredningsbetänkande]	Knowledge of Christianity [Kristendoms-kunskap]	2 h /week 3-4 years

APPENDIX

1952	“The New Upper Secondary School” The Royal National Board of Education proposed provisional reform of Upper Secondary School [<i>”Det nya gymnasiet” Kungliga skolöverstyrelsens förslag till provisorisk gymnasiereform</i>]	Knowledge of Christianity [<i>Kristendoms-kunskap</i>] A general knowledge subject, must be included in all Upper Secondary Programs. Personality fostering; <i>“The subject of Knowledge of Christianity could more than most other subjects be an instrument for personality and character fostering, which is the school's most important task. The teaching of this subject should give students awareness of the issue's seriousness and life-changing importance, and based on their own experiences and their own preferences build a personal philosophy of life”.</i>	1-2 h/ week 3-4 years
1955	Methodical instructions for the teaching of Knowledge of Christianity in Upper Secondary School [<i>Metodiska anvisningar för undervisningen i kristendoms-kunskap i gymnasiet.</i>]	Knowledge of Christianity [<i>Kristendoms-kunskap</i>] Church History and Church Knowledge, The Christian faith and view of life. Secularization. Teaching should relate to contemporary society and contemporary debates of religion Teaching should take up statements that question the Christian worldview, <i>“Christianity and idealism, creationism and evolution, Nietzschean Übermensch and Christian “man of faith”, Christian and secular approach to social problems”.</i>	1-2 h/ week 3-4 years
1960	Syllabus and methodological guidelines Upper Secondary School [<i>Kursplaner och metodiska anvisningar för gymnasiet 1960</i>]	Knowledge of Christianity [<i>Kristendoms-kunskap</i>]	1-2 h/ week 3-4 years
1965	The Swedish Government's Official Report on the Upper Secondary School [<i>1960 års gymnasientredning</i>]	Knowledge of religion [<i>Religions-kunskap</i>]	
1965	The 1965 curriculum for Upper Secondary School [<i>1965 års läroplan för gymnasiet</i>]	Knowledge of religion [<i>Religions-kunskap</i>]	2-3 h/week in one year, only certain programs
1970	The Curriculum for Upper Secondary School, Lgy 70. Different syllabus for two-year vocational programs and three to four-year programs that are preparatory for higher education. [<i>1970 års läroplan</i>]	Knowledge of religion [<i>Religions-kunskap</i>]	
1994	The Curriculum for the Voluntary School Forms, Lpf 94 [<i>1994 års läroplan för de frivilliga skolorformerna, Lpf 94</i>]	Knowledge of religion [<i>Religions-kunskap</i>]	30 -50 h i.e. 45 min-1 h/week in one year. All programs
2011	The Curriculum of 2011 for Upper Secondary School, Lgy 11 [<i>2011 års läroplan för gymnasieskolan, Lgy 11</i>]	Knowledge of religion [<i>Religions-kunskap</i>]	30 -50 h i.e. 45 min-1 h/week in one year All programs

APPENDIX

Appendix 2

Comparison of syllabus of Religious Education in terms of content and skills in the curricula of Lpf 94 (Re1201) and Lgy 11 (RELREL01)				
	<i>Content Re1201</i>	<i>Content RELREL01</i>	<i>Skills in Re1201</i>	<i>Skills in RELREL01</i>
<i>Aim / central content</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How religion and belief are reflected in the way people think and act -Christianity, world religions and views of life; expressions, beliefs, ideas -Relate subject content to everyday life and work -Ethics and morals -Values in Society -Different ways of thinking about life, faith, ethics -Importance of having one's own values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Christianity, the other world religions and different outlooks on life, their characteristics and how they are expressed by individuals and groups in the present, in Sweden and the world. -Different views of human beings and God within and between religions. -Religion in relation to gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity and sexuality. -The identities of groups and individuals and how they can be shaped in relation to religion and outlooks on life, such as written sources, traditions and historical and contemporary events. -Different views of the relationship between religion and science in current public debates. -Interpretation and analysis of different theories and models in normative ethics, and how these can be applied. Ethical and moral views of what a good life and a good society can be. -Analysis of arguments on ethical issues based on Christianity, other world religions, outlooks on life, and students' own standpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe Understand Know Relate (connect knowledge) Communicate Identify Take a stand Reflect Understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know Interpret Analyse Analysis of arguments
<i>Mark: Pass [G] / E</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rites, traditions, ways of life in different religions and views of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -world religions and some outlooks on life, their characteristics and expression historically, in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare Presents Understand Communicate Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -in basic terms give an account of -explain simple relationships -

APPENDIX

	Such knowledge about Christianity, other world religions and philosophies that increases understanding of different lifestyles Ethical and moral thinking Fundamental values	the present, in Sweden and in the world. -different interpretations and perspectives on world religions and outlooks on life in relation to individuals, groups and societies -similarities and differences between world religions' views of Man and God, -how identity can be shaped in relation to religion and outlooks on life, -how religion can relate to ethnicity, gender, sexuality and socio-economic background. -different views on the relationship between religion and science. -normative ethical theories and models, -reasoning about what a good life and a good society can be based on virtue ethics and other ethical approaches.	Relate to	draw simple conclusions -support their reasoning with simple arguments. -give some examples -do a simple analysis -in basic terms describe -apply simple reasoning
Mark: D	---	Same as for E	---	The mark D means that the knowledge requirements for the mark E and most of C are fulfilled.
Mark: Pass with distinction [VG] /C	The significance of the views of life for the individual and society, nationally and internationally Ethical problems Ethical reasoning models What tolerance means	Same as for E	Provides examples Identifies Applies Motivates Reflects individual and in group	-in detail gives an account of and analyses - draw well-grounded conclusions support their reasoning with well-grounded arguments -give some examples -draw well-grounded conclusions

APPENDIX

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -make a well-grounded analysis can in detail describe -give well-grounded arguments -apply well-grounded reasoning
Mark; B	---	Same as for E	---	The mark B means that the knowledge requirements for the mark C and most of A are fulfilled.
Mark; Pass with Excellent Distinction [MV G]/ A	<p>Similarities and differences between Christianity and other world religions' basic ideas and expression</p> <p>Attitude towards women, socially, current and historical perspective</p> <p>Ethical theories - related situations, current social issues</p> <p>life interpretations</p>	Same as for E	<p>Detects</p> <p>Applies</p> <p>Shows</p> <p>Arguing with respect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -can in detail and in a balanced way give an account of and analyse - explain complex relationships and draw well-grounded and balanced conclusions - support their reasoning with well-grounded and balanced arguments. - make a complex analysis - describe complex relationships - draw well-grounded and balanced conclusions - in detail and in a balanced way describe - give well-grounded and balanced arguments - apply well-grounded and balanced reasoning

APPENDIX

Appendix 3

School	Program	Observed lessons	Re 1201	RE 1202	Rel 1	Pupils	Informed Consent	Declined	Number of classes
School 1	The Natural Science Programme	8	8			53	47	3	2
	The Social Science Programme	30	30			83	65	0	3
School 2	The Art, Music and Drama Programme [together with the Natural Science Programme	4			4	31	28	5	1
	The Natural Science Programme	9			9	25	24	0	1
	The Social Science Programme	12	4	8		74	68	5	3
	The Technology Programme	10	10			38	34	0	2
	The Construction and Installation Programme	3	3			15	13	0	1
	The Electrical and Energy Programme	7	7			13	12	3	1
	The Business and Administration Programme	11	11			30	22	3	2
School 3	The Technology Programme	10	10			32	26	1	1
	The Child Care and Recreation Programme	16	16			41	35	1	2
	The Electrical and Energy Programme	2	2			32	28	2	1
	The Industry Engineering Programme together with The Vehicle and Transport Programme	3	3			26	19	2	1
Total		125	103	8	13	493	421	25	21

APPENDIX

Appendix 4

Från Karin Kittelmann Flensner

Göteborg 2011-09-01

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Till skolledningen vid X-gymnasiet

Förfrågan angående deltagande vid religionslektioner

Jag heter Karin Kittelmann Flensner och har en förfrågan om att få delta vid religionsundervisningen i några klasser vid X-gymnasiet. Jag är gymnasielärare i religion, samhällskunskap och historia och sedan ett år tillbaka doktorand vid Centrum för Utbildnings- och Lärarforskning (CUL) vid Göteborgs universitet, med placering vid Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria och religion.Handledare är professor Åke Sander och universitetslektor Kerstin von Brömssen.

Min forskning handlar om hur religionskunskapsämnet gestaltar sig i klassrummet där många olika åsikter, uppfattningar och trosföreställningar är representerade. Dagens pluralistiska samhälle ställer ökade didaktiska krav på lärare och det behövs mer kunskap om hur ämnet ”blir” i praktiken. Fördjupad kunskap kan om detta kan bidra till ett mer tolerant och öppet samhällsklimat och därmed en hållbar utveckling.

Jag ber om ert samtycke till att få närvara vid religionskunskapslektioner på olika program under läsåret 2011-2012. Vid en ämneslärarträff 110901 informerades lärarna om min studie och ett flertal ställde sig positiva till att delta och min närvaro vid deras lektioner. Eleverna kommer att informeras om studiens syfte, hur informationen kommer att samlas in och användas, både muntligt och skriftligt. Eleverna lämnar skriftligt sitt samtycke att delta. Deltagandet i studien är frivilligt och om någon, lärare eller elev, vill avbryta fortsatt medverkan kan detta ske utan att ange något som helst skäl. Alla elever måste ge sitt aktiva samtycke och om en elev inte vill att det han eller hon säger ska användas i studien utelämnas det han eller hon säger i klassrummet och kommer då inte att användas som underlag för studiens resultat.

Studien innebär att jag är närvarande i klassrummet och för anteckningar. Även vissa ljudupptagningar kommer att göras, men då i samförstånd med den undervisande läraren. Eventuellt kommer jag att samtala med grupper av eleverna om frågor som kommit upp på lektionerna. All insamlad information kommer att kodas och behandlas på ett konfidentiellt sätt, vilket innebär att det bearbetas, analyseras och redovisas så att ingen enskild person kommer att kunna kännas igen. Under arbetet kommer informationen förvaras inläst på institutionen. Om det är möjligt skulle jag gärna påbörja mina observationer redan vecka 39 undervisande lärare ställde sig positiv till min närvaro. Jag tar kontakt inom två veckor och kommer gärna till X-gymnasiet och berättar mer om studien. Har ni frågor och funderingar kontakta mig via mail eller telefon.

Med vänlig hälsning

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Appendix 5

Forskningsprojekt: Religionskunskap i 2000-talets Sverige

Bakgrund och syfte

Jag heter Karin Kittelmann Flensner och är gymnasielärare i religionskunskap. Sedan ett år tillbaka är jag doktorand vid Göteborgs universitet. Min forskning handlar om att få mer kunskap och förståelse för hur religionskunskapsämnet gestaltar sig i klassrummet i dagens samhälle där många olika åsikter, uppfattningar och trosföreställningar, både religiösa och icke-religiösa, finns representerade. Detta påverkar undervisning och lärande och medför ökade krav på lärare och elever. För att utforma en bra religionskunskapsundervisning som bidrar till tolerans och förståelse behövs mer kunskap om det här området. Det övergripande syftet med min studie är att ta reda på hur ämnet "blir" i praktiken i samspel mellan lärare och elever, hur diskussionerna går under lektionerna och vad elever tycker och tänker om religionskunskapsämnets innehåll. Mitt syfte är inte att reda ut frågor om "rätt" eller "fel", utan att undersöka hur undervisning i ämnet religionskunskap går till och hur det diskuteras i dagens skola och gymnasieutbildning.

Fråga om ditt deltagande och hur studien kommer att gå till

Skolledning och undervisande lärare har gett sitt godkännande till att jag får närvara vid religionskunskapslektionerna och nu frågar jag också dig om ditt medgivande till detta. För att nå studiens syfte kommer jag att närvara vid religionskunskapslektioner, göra anteckningar och vid tillfälle prata med elever om frågor som uppkommit under lektionen. Vid vissa tillfällen kommer ljudupptagningar av lektioner och samtal att göras, vilket självklart kommer att ske öppet och i samförstånd med undervisande lärare och elever.

Hantering av data, och sekretess

All insamlad information kommer att kodas och behandlas på ett konfidentiellt sätt, vilket innebär att det bearbetas, analyseras och redovisas så att ingen enskild person kommer att kunna kännas igen. Under arbetet kommer informationen förvaras inlåst på institutionen.

Frivillighet

Att delta är helt frivilligt, och om du inte vill att det du säger under lektionen ska utgöra en del av underlaget till min avhandling kryssar du bara i detta i svarstalongen nedan. Om du av någon anledning under studiens gång vill avbryta ditt deltagande meddelar du bara mig detta, och du behöver inte uppge något skäl till varför.

Ansvarig för projektet är doktorand Karin Kittelmann Flensner, anställd vid Göteborgs Universitet. Handledare är professor Åke Sander och universitetslektor Kerstin von Brömssen.

Om du har några frågor, synpunkter eller tankar, kontakta mig gärna på mail; karin.kittelmann.flensner@gu.se eller mobil: XXXX-XXXXXX

Med vänlig hälsning

Karin Kittelmann Flensner

APPENDIX

Religionskunskap i 2000-talets Sverige

Ja, jag samtycker till att delta. Jag har fått information om studiens syfte, hur undersökningen kommer att gå till och att materialet kommer att kodas så att ingen enskild person kommer att kunna identifieras. Jag har också fått tillfälle att ställa frågor.

Nej, jag vill inte delta

Namn: _____

Klass: _____

Skola: _____



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR LITTERATUR,
IDÉHISTORIA OCH RELIGION

**Avhandlingar framlagda vid Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria och religion,
Göteborgs universitet**

**(Dissertations defended at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion,
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