

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE, HISTORY OF IDEAS, AND RELIGION

Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

in Humanities with specialization in Educational Science, to be publicly defended, by due permission of the dean of the Faculty of Arts at University of Gothenburg.

Friday December 11, 2015, 1:15 p.m.,
University of Gothenburg, Faculty of Arts, Gamla Hovrätten, Olof Vijksgatan 6
Room T302.

Faculty opponent: Associate Professor Judith Everington, University of Warwick
Advisory committee: Associate Professor Marie Carlson, University of Gothenburg
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Professor Arne Rasmusson, University of Gothenburg
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Abstract

Karin Kittelmann Flensner (2015) *Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden*. Doctoral dissertation at the department of Literature, History of ideas, and Religion. University of Gothenburg, Box 200, SE 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden. ISBN 978-91-88348-68-5 Online: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/40808>

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hegemonic in the classroom practice and implied norm of talking about religion, religions and worldviews as something outdated and belonging to history.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.

Keywords: Religious Education, secularism, spirituality, nationalism, Swedishness, education, ethnography, classroom observation, discourse analysis.