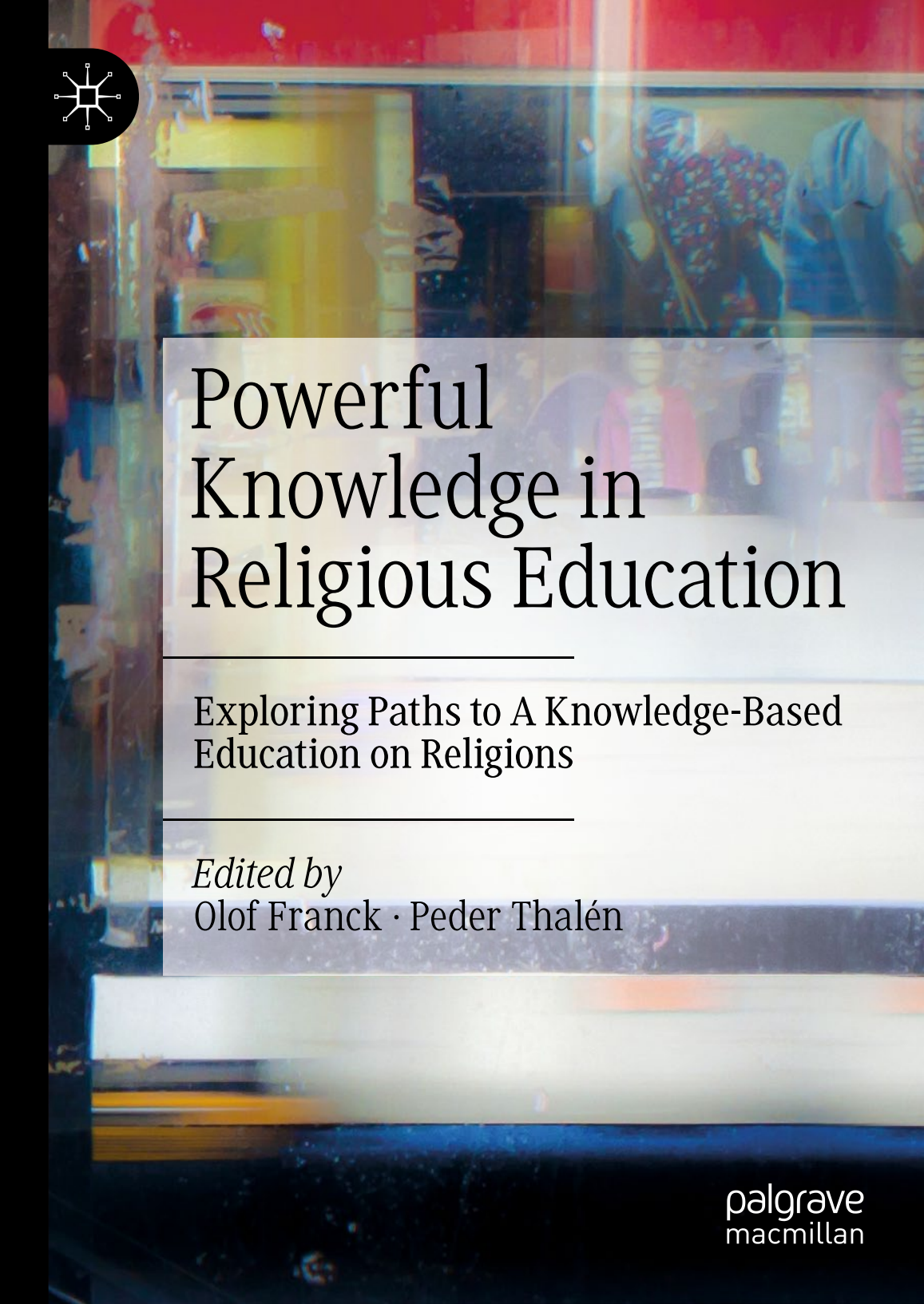

Powerful Knowledge in Religious Education

Exploring Paths to A Knowledge-Based Education on Religions

Edited by
Olof Franck · Peder Thalén

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Preface

In our time, it is frequently discussed how teaching on religions can and should be designed and developed. In countries where Religious Education (RE) is part of the school's overall teaching activities, questions regarding the kind of content such subject can, and should, be expected to include are in focus. Not infrequently, these discussions seem to have come to focus on methodological issues, on issues that concern how teaching about religions should be conducted in a successful way in various respects.

These are, of course, important and fundamental issues where not least pedagogical and didactic perspectives will be at the centre. At the same time, it is conceivable that these issues may risk taking over the entire subject discussions, unless questions concerning the content of the teaching, the what-questions, are given considerable space. What kind of knowledge about religions and life-views may be a candidate to form a theoretical basis for RE? How is this intended knowledge justified? Do these motifs signal an essential view of what a subject content is and can be? Who defines such a theoretical basis for RE: Is it teachers, researchers or administrative and political actors with power over the school's policy documents? And what are the consequences for how teaching about religions and life-views is perceived and conducted?

An influential approach to discussing the relevance and meaning of a knowledge-based subject teaching is the one associated with Michael Young and his writing with a focus on the concept of powerful

knowledge. According to Young, powerful knowledge is characterized by two characteristics: It is specialized, in how it is produced (in workshops, seminars and labs) and in how it is transmitted (in schools, colleges and universities), and this specialization is expressed in the boundaries between disciplines and subjects which define their focus and objects of study. In other words, it is not general knowledge.

This does not mean that boundaries are fixed and not changeable. However, it does mean that cross-disciplinary research and learning depend on discipline-based knowledge. It is differentiated from the experiences that pupils bring to school or older learners bring to college or university. This differentiation is expressed in the conceptual boundaries between school and everyday knowledge (Young 2013, 108). Young's emphasis on the school's knowledge, being such that it transcends students' everyday experiences, has been—and is—the subject of extensive discussion. An education which is not primarily motivated by reference to instrumental factors such as creating good conditions for future employment opens up for interesting philosophical and pedagogical investigations.

One main question is how research and teaching can meet in knowledge-based teaching. Young's approach has been described as a social realist: "A social theory must recognize that some knowledge is objective in ways that transcend the historical conditions of its production" (ibid., 28). This approach is important to investigate with regard to its relevance for an analysis of how epistemological issues take place and are expressed by conceptions of subject content in school subjects. What does it mean that such content "transcends students' everyday experiences" and that it has its basis in academia from which contributions to knowledge-based teaching are made possible? This is an important issue, not least for RE. In many educational contexts, the issue of knowledge content in this subject is discussed intensively and loudly. How could such content be perceived in RE? Is there a kind of knowledge which students, participating in RE teaching, have the right to get access to? Is there a kind of knowledge they can be said to be entitled to, building a platform for development on their own and together with others? How is one to understand the idea that there is a given, albeit at the same time changeable, knowledge that constitutes the core of the subject?

This anthology is intended to draw attention to different approaches to the question of how a knowledge-based RE can be understood and developed. It seems that this intention is well motivated, considering an apparent present-day need for exploring paths to a knowledge-based education on religions.

In Chap. 1, Friedrich Schweitzer approaches theme of the anthology with reference to the question how knowledge and education should be related by making use of three different lenses: education as *Bildung*, competences and Paulo Freire's liberationist approach to education. In the tradition of German philosophy of education, the guiding principle of *Bildung* regulates the role of knowledge in education by demanding that knowledge must be taught in such a way that it serves the development of autonomous persons. Yet in reality, the syllabi, for example, for RE are much less aspiring. According to Schweitzer, the academic discipline of religious education in Germany has not really addressed the question of what knowledge should be taught and on what principles the selection of content should be based. At the end, the article comes back to the relationship between knowledge and (religious) education by asking about the potential of Michael Young's understanding of powerful knowledge in relationship to the German religious education discussion which so far has not shown much interest in Young's ideas.

In Chap. 2, Karin Sporre, Christina Osbeck and Annika Lilja discusses the concept of powerful knowledge in relation to the Swedish context where the RE subject since the 1960s is a confessionally neutral and broad subject that includes not only knowledge of religions but also ethics and 'livsfrågor' [existential questions]. A central theme in the chapter is the authors' arguments for that there is a need for a qualified discussion about powerful knowledge, and what constitute powerful knowledge, also in these fields. However, such a discussion cannot take as its only point of reference the potential strength in concepts and discourses. There is also a need for a dialectic relationship between 'curriculum' and 'child'. A teaching that does not reach the children that the teaching is to engage cannot be considered meaningful, no matter how powerful the knowledge paid attention to may be. In addition, if knowledge also is contextual, powerful knowledge can only be powerful in the practices that acknowledge this knowledge and allows it to be powerful.

In Chap. 3, Olof Franck highlights Michael Young's and Johan Muller's interpretive approach where powerful knowledge is described in terms of *know how* (Muller & Young, 2019). With reference to Christine Counsell's discussion on subject-related knowledge processes as *infrastructures* (Counsell, 2018), where relevant sets of facts and subject-related methods and models interact, they seem to interpret such processes as arenas where a pursuit of truth is going on with regard to both subject-specific and cross-disciplinary prerequisites, aims and methods (cf Young, 2010; 2008). Powerful knowledge hereby, in certain respects, seems to appear as two-dimensional. This two-dimensionality is critically discussed in terms of semantical as well as epistemological and ontological considerations with regard to RE, relating to what seems to be certain subject-specific challenges when it comes to teach on the concepts of 'truth' and 'knowledge'.

In Chap. 4, Peter Schreiner presents the project on International Knowledge Transfer in Religious Education (IKT), which is a scholarly project that contributes to the idea that religious education should become an integrated field of research on an international level. It deals with different types of knowledge and asks: What exactly is meant by 'knowledge' in religious education? And to what degree is knowledge in religious education transferable or even universal? Schreiner explores the parallels between the IKT project and the project to transfer the concept of powerful knowledge to RE and finds several similarities: 'knowledge' is central to both projects and some overlapping concerns of how the term is used can be identified. A second similarity is that the central questions of the IKT project also are relevant for the debate on PK for RE. They also stimulate the discussion about the place and value of knowledge in teaching and learning in school. Schreiner discusses as well how both projects are influenced by developments that go beyond national concerns and manifest a European and international dimension.

In Chap. 5, Sivane Hirsch explains Quebec's "Ethics and Religious Culture" program (ERC) which was designed to help secondary students gain a better understanding of the province's major religious traditions. The program adopted a 'cultural approach' to the topic, aiming to give the students a broad survey of what it referred to as the 'phenomenon of religion'. However, this approach presented several challenges for teachers

and their trainers. After severe criticism, ERC will be replaced in 2023 by a new version called "Culture and citizenship in Quebec" (CCQ). Hirsch examines the knowledge related to teaching about religions that may be addressed—explicitly or implicitly—in this new program and how this teaching will make it possible to evoke the notion of religious diversity. A central question is: How can explicit and expert knowledge about religions be approached? To answer this question, the ERC program, in its new CCQ version, is approached as a case study. At the end of the chapter, Hirsch looks at some specific examples of the pedagogical tools used to examine religious diversity in schools.

In Chap. 6 Michael Reiss explores the arguments behind both Michael Young's ideas about powerful knowledge and an approach that begins with big ideas, examining in particular their applicability within Religious Education. The point of departure for his analysis is an aims-based approach to Religious Education. He pays particular attention to what is so distinctive about Religious Education in comparison with mathematics, science and the arts. We are, according to Reiss, less likely to reach agreement about the aims and classroom approaches in Religious Education than in any other school subject. He concludes on epistemological grounds that it seems likely that Young's arguments about powerful knowledge cannot be applied to Religious Education in the way they can to some other school subjects.

In Chap. 7, Marios Koukounaras Liagkis explores the role of knowledge in the RE curriculum, using philosophical, theological and educational argumentation. He discusses the differences between the Greek ideas of *paideia* (αγωγή/παιδεία) and *education* (εκπαίδευση). The discussion relies also on Biesta's distinction between 'cultivation humanity' and 'educating the human'. Above all, the key point in the chapter is that Dewey's theory of knowing works hand in hand with substantive knowledge and its transformative power in individual's life where the other is more than significant. RE's *what* of education is according to Koukounaras as important as the how of education. Content and process are perceived here as an educational experience (thinking, reflection and action) which provides within the curriculum context the 'language game' of the religion(s) and worldviews, facilitating students' knowledge processes and therefore communication with self and others, and their cosmopolitanism.

Leni Franken highlights in Chap. 8 what she describes as the liberal democratic main aim of education, namely, the preparation of children and young adults for an autonomous and responsible life in the future society. Franken directs a detailed criticism against that Christian (and other) faith-based schools are (partly) subsidized by the state in most European nations and in addition, a substantial number of state schools offer denominational religious education. She shows that this kind of religious education or education 'into' religion is, as regards organization, aims, content and methodology, substantially different from liberal education and can therefore be considered as an anomaly in education. Moreover, even in a more 'modest' critical form, religious education, which starts from a partisan insider's perspective rather than from an impartial outsider's perspective, is hard to defend according to Franken. Alternatively, religion education or education 'about' religion is, with regard to organization, aims, content and methodology, better in line with the liberal education paradigm. Finally, attention is given to 'big questions' and the 'semantic potential of religion'.

Martha Shaw, in Chap. 10, presents the idea of 'worldview literacy' as a framework to support worldviews education. This framework builds on the concept of 'religious literacy' but goes beyond reductive conceptualisations of the latter as knowledge, skills and attitudes vis-à-vis religious diversity, to present a framework for a transformative process of educational praxis. Understood as a process of praxis in which interpretation and application are interwoven, worldview literacy emphasizes the interdependency of substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge in a process of critical, reflexive interpretation that is inseparable from skills development and personal formation. Shaw argues that this process is transformational in two senses. Firstly, in relation to the individual who undergoes a transformation through reflexive encounter with the subject matter, and secondly, in relation to the public sphere as the process is an enactment of engagement in plurality that promotes critical consciousness and empathy. According to Shaw this offers a way of reconciling what are sometimes seen as conflicting aims of personal and social and academic development.

In Chap. 9, Karna Kjeldsen analyses and discusses more specifically what may constitute the core subject-specific general knowledge, skills, conceptual knowledge and content areas of the study of religions and RE

in theory and practice, using Denmark as a case study. Moreover, Kjeldsen argues why this approach is relevant in order to meet the standard of normal school subjects in democratic, pluralistic and secular countries. The first part of the chapter identifies subject-specific knowledge and skills in the study of religions as an academic discipline derived from readings of key publications on theoretical and methodological issues and a comparative analysis of study of religions programmes offered by university departments in Denmark. The second part explores how the identified central knowledge and skills differ from or resemble those covered by the national curriculum and some of the most popular RE material used in the primary school (1–9 grade level) in Denmark. Finally, Kjeldsen takes up to consideration some of the challenges to implementing subject-based core knowledge and skills based on the (critical) study of religions in RE in schools and discusses whether it is possible to identify and legitimize such core knowledge and skills in the first place. Moreover, it argues why this approach is relevant in order to meet the standard of normal school subjects in democratic, pluralistic and secular countries.

In Chap. 11, finally, Peder Thalén highlights some overlooked aspects of the 'knowledge problem' and points to theoretical weaknesses in the intellectual foundation of non-confessional RE. Thalén discusses how Young's program for a knowledge-based education brings with it some difficult questions when it is transferred to the field of religious education. Some of the basic or most central concepts in RE such as 'religion' and 'world religions' have been questioned for a long time—especially the Western bias and Christian influence—in the academic community starting as early as 1962 with the work *The Meaning and End of Religion* by W. C. Smith. This criticism has since deepened a lot through the research conducted in the field of critical religion. Therefore, if RE is to be able to convey a knowledge which has generalizable meanings and a degree of objectivity that goes beyond its Western context, a new conceptual repertoire is to some extent needed. However, this chapter will not suggest new concepts but discusses a prior question: What kind of theoretical concepts should be avoided and which should be pursued?

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1

Powerful Knowledge in Religious Education? Perspectives in Conversation with Michael Young and Paulo Freire

Friedrich Schweitzer

Introduction

The starting point of this chapter is the question of knowledge and its meaning for religious education (RE). It seems fair to say that this question has not received much attention in religious education discussions of the last few decades, neither in Germany where I live and work nor, as far as I can tell, in international debates. Should the conclusion from this observation be that the question of knowledge is not important in this field? Does knowledge not matter in RE? Or should issues related to knowledge in RE be considered a neglected topic which is in need of further clarification?

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In a recent statement, Richard Kueh (2018) has taken the second position. He is even of the opinion that the crisis of RE (at least in the United Kingdom) is a crisis of knowledge. By this he means that RE is lacking a clear knowledge base and that the only possible way out of this crisis must therefore be a new debate about knowledge in religious education and about a clear knowledge base for the school subject of RE as well as, by implication, for the academic discipline of religious education and its understanding of knowledge. One of the sources from which Kueh expects RE to draw for a better knowledge base is Michael Young's understanding of powerful knowledge.

In the following, Young's concept of powerful knowledge will also be used, in this case as a background against which such questions about the role of knowledge in RE can be discussed in new ways. I will therefore start out by briefly presenting my understanding of Young's concept in the context of RE. After that, I will turn to the German religious education discussion in terms of two other concepts which have been of core importance for German religious education and beyond, the concept of *Bildung* on the one hand and the concept of competences on the other. What could the idea of powerful knowledge add to an understanding of religious education based on *Bildung* and competences? At the same time, these two concepts will also be used for showing certain shortcomings implied by the notion of powerful knowledge in the context of religious education.

The two concepts of *Bildung* and competences have both been chosen because of their importance for the religious education discussion. It should be clear from the beginning, however, that these two concepts are in fact quite different, both in terms of their origins and in terms of their theoretical backgrounds. The concept of *Bildung* has a long history which goes back to the Middle Ages and ultimately to Antiquity. The word itself is hard to translate into English but there are equivalents, for example, in Scandinavian languages (*dannelse*) or in Greek (*paideia*/παιδεία). *Bildung* is connected to a particular view of education which is of interest in the present context because it can be contrasted, at least in part, to the idea of powerful knowledge. The second concept used in the following, that is competences, only has a short history. Most of all it has come into use in

the wake of the PISA studies, at least in its current meaning. This concept is of interest here because it intentionally does not emphasize content or knowledge but the importance of abilities acquired by the learning person.

So far, the concept of powerful knowledge has not found its way into the German religious education discussion which implies that the intention in the following will not be to report on an existing discussion (for references to the concept of powerful knowledge in the Swedish and in the UK discussions on RE, see Kueh, 2018; Biesta et al., 2019; Osbeck, 2020; Franck, 2021). Instead, the question will be what the concept of powerful knowledge could possibly mean for religious education and what benefits are to be expected from making use of the concept of powerful knowledge in this field, but also vice versa, what the tradition especially of *Bildung* as well as a focus on pupils' competences might have to add to the understanding of powerful knowledge.

Yet answering the question of what role Young's concept of powerful knowledge could mean for religious education presupposes still another step of analysis which will focus on Young's second core concept, knowledge of the powerful. Young's distinction between powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful has interesting parallels in the religious education discussion. In this case, it is the work of Paulo Freire which has informed the understanding in Germany as well as in many other countries. Consequently, it will be of interest to see how Young's epistemological understanding of powerful knowledge compares to Freire's liberationist interpretation of the role of knowledge and power in education. Therefore, in a final step, a comparison between the approaches of Michael Young and Paulo Freire will be attempted. In conclusion, some perspectives for the future will be offered.

Finally, a note on terminology is in place. The acronym RE will be used in this chapter in reference to the respective school subject while 'religious education' (in the lower case) refers to the academic discipline related to this subject as well as to the field of religious education in general. In the German language, there are two words for this (*Religionsunterricht* and *Religionspädagogik*). The English language does not allow for this distinction.

The Concept of Powerful Knowledge in the Context of Religious Education

In this section, readers will be offered a brief summary of my understanding of Young's work on powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful. Moreover, first possible connections between the idea of powerful knowledge and RE as well as religious education will be identified, most of all in terms of a number of questions concerning the role of knowledge in this field.

One of Young's starting points concerning his concept of powerful knowledge is the widespread demand to take knowledge in general education more seriously. In one of his first publications concerning powerful knowledge he developed a critique of educational programmes and policies demanding a stronger focus on knowledge in education without specifying the nature of this knowledge. Young calls this the 'emptying of content' which he describes in the following way: 'My argument is that an empty and rhetorical notion of knowledge and the increasing tendency to blur distinctions between the production of knowledge and its acquisition and between knowledge and skills—the latter unlike the former being measurable and targetable—becomes a way of denying a distinct "voice" for knowledge in education' (Young, 2009, p. 195).

Next to this plea for becoming clearer about the knowledge to be taught, it is the distinction between powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful which is central for Young's point of view (see e.g. Young, 2013a). For him, the knowledge of the powerful is the opposite of powerful knowledge. It means knowledge prescribed and required by those in power, not only in politics but also in other fields. In this case, knowledge is created by the powerful, not by true insights into the nature of reality but through their political influence and domination. Against all attempts of determining the place of knowledge in education without making the epistemological quality of respective knowledge the decisive criterion, he insists on the need for powerful knowledge as knowledge whose power is an inherent epistemological characteristic or quality of this knowledge itself.

Young developed his idea of powerful knowledge in a series of publications beginning about 15 years ago (cf. especially Young, 2008). In line with Rob Moore whom he actually quotes in this context, Young demands an epistemological examination of the knowledge to be taught for which he suggests four criteria. The knowledge must be 'critical' in the sense of being 'open to revision', 'emergentist' in that it is recognized that it is not limited in its validity to the situation of its production, 'realist', that is, based on the conviction that 'the objects of knowledge of both the natural and social worlds are realities that (a) are independent of our perception of the world and (b) provide limits to how we can know about the world', 'materialist' because it is recognized that 'knowledge is produced (and acquired) in specific historically created modes of production, or in Bourdieu's terms, intellectual fields' (Young, 2009, p. 197).

In a later paper, Young argues that 'we have the responsibility to hand on to the next generation the knowledge discovered by earlier generations' (Young, 2013a, p.101). The power inherent to this knowledge demands its being handed on—an argument which connects the idea of powerful knowledge to questions of schooling in general and especially to questions of the curriculum. Moreover, in a joint publication, Young and Muller (2013) point out that powerful knowledge also is a special kind of knowledge because it is produced In specialized institutions like universities or research institutes. Powerful knowledge then is not only special but it is also specialized (p. 231). Another important clarification refers to the relationship between powerful knowledge and empowerment: 'we explicitly do not understand "powerful knowledge" as "empowerment", but as referring to "knowledge with powers" or the "powers of powerful knowledge"' (Young, 2013b, p. 196). Nevertheless, Young claims that powerful knowledge can strengthen pupils' understanding of the world: '"Powerful knowledge" is powerful because it provides the best understanding of the natural and social worlds that we have and helps us go beyond our individual experiences; even the creative and performing arts, and literature and drama, have these emergent properties and universalising properties, albeit not based on generalisations' (p. 196). This is why it is an 'entitlement for all pupils and students' (p. 196).

While Young and also Muller are most interested in not confusing power and knowledge, that is that no external power is allowed to define

the status of knowledge as knowledge (as with the knowledge of the powerful), they seem to have changed their views concerning the relationship between powerful knowledge and empowerment in their summary paper published a few years later (Muller & Young, 2019). Now they seem to assume a clearer connection between powerful knowledge and empowerment, depending on successful teachers: 'When they are successful, and the pupils learn successfully, the pupils become empowered in a range of ways: in the quality of their discernment and judgement; in their appreciation of the range and reach of the substantive and conceptual fields of the subject; and in their appreciation that the substantive detail they have learnt is only part of what the hinterland of the subject has to offer. They are able to make new connections, gain new insights, generate new ideas. That is why PK is at the heart of true schooling' (p. 210).

The following summary from Young may be helpful:

> Powerful knowledge is systematic. Its concepts are systematically related to one another and shared in groups, such as subject or disciplinary associations. It is not, like common sense, rooted in the specific contexts of our experience. This means that powerful knowledge can be the basis for generalisations and thinking beyond particular contexts or cases. The clearest examples both of the systematic structure of powerful knowledge and of its role as a resource for generalising are found in the natural sciences. However, other forms of subject knowledge, such as the social sciences, humanities and the arts, also have concepts that take us beyond particular cases and contexts in different ways, and offer us different capacities for generalisation, due to the nature of the phenomena they are concerned with. (Young, 2015)

There has been an extended critical debate on the concept of powerful knowledge in general education (see Muller & Young, 2019 for respective references and responses to the critics). Instead of reviewing this debate, my focus will be on the field of religious education. Can the concept of powerful knowledge be applied to RE? And if so, in what respects?

Young himself does not address religious education although, in the quote above (Young, 2015), he explicitly foresees implications of his concept of powerful knowledge for 'other forms of subject knowledge' beyond the natural sciences which, in his case, appear to be the first

context for developing the notion of powerful knowledge. If religious education or academic disciplines like theology or religious studies related to religious education can count as part of these 'other forms of subject knowledge', one needs to clarify the meaning of powerful knowledge in this specific context. Three questions to be addressed in the following can be of special importance in this respect:

- What is the role of knowledge in religious education? Should it receive more emphasis? And if so, in which ways?
- Is there anything in religious education which could be considered powerful knowledge? How can powerful knowledge be identified in religious education?
- How should the relationship between powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful be interpreted in religious education?

As indicated above, these three questions will be taken up in the following in different ways by discussing them in connection to *Bildung*, competences and Freire's approach to education.

Knowledge and *Bildung*

The concept of *Bildung* is rather complex and, at least in some ways, hard to define. While its meaning overlaps with the connotations of 'education' it carries with it a particular history and heritage through which it goes beyond the concept of 'education' (for an overview cf. Bollenbeck, 1994; Tenorth, 2020; concerning religious education, see Schweitzer, 2014; on *Bildung* and theology, see Schröder, 2021). The German word itself has roots in medieval religious thought and theology. At the same time, it is sometimes interpreted as translation of Neo-Platonic terms like the Greek *eidon* (image) and the Latin *imago* as well as of the Hebrew terms *zelem* and *demût* (likeness) in Gen 1,26f. concerning the human likeness to God. In the field of education, it was the so-called German classics who, in the early nineteenth century, set forth the most influential understandings of *Bildung,* in the first place Wilhelm von Humboldt and also Friedrich Schleiermacher. In this view, the guiding idea of all

education must be to support the development of an autonomous person or individual self-characterized by independent reflexivity and self-determination coupled with critical thinking and responsibility for others.

Given this aspiring understanding of the aim of education it is easy to see why the acquisition of knowledge could only play a secondary role for education understood as *Bildung*. *Bildung* necessarily cannot be equated with the acquisition of knowledge (for teaching and learning cf. the influential position of Klafki, 1963, who makes this very clear from the beginning). However, in the reality of German schools and the syllabi guiding their work, knowledge has always played a crucial role. These syllabi often contain, allegedly in the name of *Bildung,* long lists of topics related to the different school subjects and to the academic disciplines behind them. What is not clear in these syllabi (and beyond), however, is how the two layers or strata are meant to be related to each other—the rather abstract ideal of *Bildung* referring to the formation of the autonomous self on the one hand and the contents prescribed in the syllabi on the other. Similarly, the discussions in academic religious education often refer to *Bildung* as well as to different approaches to teaching religious education, but they rarely touch upon the question of what knowledge should be taught or treated in RE. In this respect, the discussion on powerful knowledge could be quite helpful by inspiring a new discussion on the content of religious education. On what basis should content be selected for teaching in RE? What are the criteria applied in this selection? Is there powerful knowledge to be found in RE? The reference to the development of an autonomous self in the sense of *Bildung* obviously does not provide sufficiently concrete answers to the question of what knowledge should be included in RE.

At the same time, there also are critical impulses from the idea of *Bildung* concerning the understanding of powerful knowledge. In the tradition of German philosophy of education, the guiding principle of *Bildung* regulates the role of knowledge in education by demanding that knowledge must always and consistently be chosen and taught in such a way that it serves the development of an autonomous self. In this respect, any understanding of powerful knowledge would be incomplete which does not refer to the meaning of this knowledge for particular persons and their development. Contrary to this, as shown above, Young seems to

assume that the power of powerful knowledge is inherent to this knowledge itself, quite independently of the person who might acquire it. From an educational perspective based on *Bildung*, however, the power of any given knowledge can only exert its wished-for powerful effects within a certain relationship to a particular person or group of persons. For example, true knowledge concerning quantum physics will most likely not be powerful for a first grader, while it may be quite powerful for older adolescents or a university student in that it can truly broaden their minds.

Yet what could powerful knowledge mean in the field of religious education? Since Young refers to the disciplinary nature of powerful knowledge, the first reference would be to theology and/or religious studies (depending on the context of a particular country and model of RE and its implied relationship to certain academic disciplines). An example of powerful knowledge would then be that the insights gained in specialized scientific research concerning, for example, the Bible or the Quran must be included, instead of personal and individual perspectives on such sources. Moreover, the history of Christianity and Islam has been the object of rigorous academic research so that new insights have become available. Still another example could refer to research concerning the different religions and their contemporary expressions. For example, what is true about these religions and what not? Do all Muslim women wear the headscarf? Do all Muslims pray five times a day? Concerning such questions there is specialized knowledge in the sense of Young's description—knowledge based on sound research which is produced in research institutes and which can always be revised. As described above, following Young, the older generation has an obligation to pass on such knowledge to younger generations so that it does not get lost. Another example could be the different forms of religious expression which have often been of special interest to people. The verbal images of the Psalms or the visionary structure of a peaceful world order entailed in the first book of the Bible, the life of a prophet or of a person living her or his life based on divine love. These could be examples of powerful knowledge which fascinates people although the powerful may not find it useful at all.

Are there also theoretical concepts or particular kinds of knowledge related to them which could be identified as powerful knowledge in this

case? Possible candidates could be basic religious/theological concepts like 'God', the divine, revelation and experience, faith, truth and certainty, conversion and so on—concepts which play a key role for theology and religious studies. Powerful knowledge in RE would then mean that such basic concepts are taken up and that the scientific use and understanding of these concepts are presented. This reference to basic concepts has a parallel in the recent discussion on 'threshold concepts' in religious education. 'Threshold concepts' are identified here as something like an eye-opener which allows for a new and deeper understanding of religious phenomena or even religion altogether (cf. Niemi, 2018). In the present context, they can therefore be considered as powerful knowledge as well, at least as far as they are related to the scientific study of religion and religions. In the field of religious education, however, the idea of focusing on 'threshold concepts' is relatively new and consequently not well-developed yet. So far, the respective discussion has led to the identification of four such concepts (Niemi, 2018, p. 2): lived religion, world religion paradigm, emic/etic, orthodoxy/orthopraxis—concepts which have in common that they can be applied to the whole field of religious phenomena and that their application does lead to a more differentiated understanding and interpretation of these phenomena. For this reason, such concepts can also become important at an individual level, for example, by making pupils think about religion in new ways.

At the same time, these few examples of what powerful knowledge could mean in RE clearly indicate that no more than tentative attempts at identifying powerful knowledge in the field of religious education are possible at this point. Much more work would need to be done before the concept of powerful knowledge can be fully applied to this field in a meaningful and systematically controlled manner. For example, the idea of identifying threshold concepts for RE is a promising beginning but, at least until now, it is still waiting for broader exploration. From the perspective of *Bildung*, it remains important that none of these concepts or key terms should be, as it were, imported, for example from theology or religious studies, into education without considering its relationship to the needs, interests and abilities of the learning and developing person as well as the overarching aim of supporting their development as

autonomous selves. In this view, it is actually impossible to identify powerful knowledge or threshold concepts without considering their potential usefulness for particular persons.

Competences—Without Knowledge Base?

Just like in many other countries, educational debates including the field of religious education in Germany have had a strong focus on competences in the last two decades. These debates followed the lead of the PISA studies which, as is well known, do not refer to religious education itself but are nevertheless considered important for this school subject as well. Especially in the first years of the respective debates there were competing and contradictory opinions (from the religious education discussion in Germany cf. the collections edited by Rothgangel & Fischer, 2004; Sajak, 2012). Some considered the understanding of competences in studies like PISA helpful because they referred to the learner and to the abilities acquired by the learning person, instead of only looking at contents and what has to be learned without taking the learning person into consideration. Others however, were critical of the idea of constantly measuring pupils' achievements, warned of the now infamous effects of 'teaching to the test' and deplored the time used for testing instead of teaching and learning.

Yet in spite of such debates which have accompanied so-called competence-oriented approaches from the beginning, it took much longer before another problem came into view, the issue of content or of the knowledge to be taught at school and to be addressed in teacher education (cf., for example, Heer & Heinen, 2020). The understanding of competences in PISA-like studies intentionally does not focus on content as presented in the different syllabi around the world. These syllabi are treated as more or less contingent since they often strongly reflect local or regional traditions and circumstances, and mastering the content prescribed by them does not necessarily say much about pupils' abilities when compared at an international level. Especially concerning international comparisons this decision makes sense. Comparing competences is more promising than, for example, comparing grades gained within the

context and framework of different syllabi and in relationship to standards which are not comparable. However, while the advantages of a competence-oriented approach in international comparative research are quite obvious, things look different concerning syllabi. So-called competence-oriented syllabi typically prescribe a number of competences or abilities to be acquired by the pupils as well as the degree to which the different competences should be mastered after a certain number of years of schooling. In the meantime, however, it has become obvious that prescribing competence levels is not enough for subjects like RE which are heavily dependent on the familiarity with particular contents. There may be mathematical literacy which is independent of contents. Yet, for example, there is no general biblical competence in the sense of an ability that would be independent of the familiarity with certain texts. For this reason, the syllabi for RE had to also specify the knowledge to be taught in RE next to the competences, but the competence models could only be of help in this respect in terms of the ways in which contents should be taught but not concerning the question of what contents should be selected. In other words, just like in the case of *Bildung,* there were or are again two different levels in the syllabi now, descriptions of competences based on defined theories (even if the empirical basis of competence models for RE is still weak in most countries) on the one hand and lists of contents which have no theoretical or empirical basis or for which no such basis is mentioned, at least not in terms of competences, on the other.

It is at this point where Young's understanding of powerful knowledge might be of interest for religious education. From his understanding of powerful knowledge it becomes obvious that knowledge matters in education and that any understanding of education which does not address the quality of the knowledge to be included or excluded and to be offered to pupils or to be withheld from them will remain incomplete. For him, this is a result of epistemological considerations. As he points out, there is a clear difference between what can be called everyday knowledge based on everyday experiences and specialized knowledge gained in a disciplinary-controlled manner in line with standards of scientific falsification (cf. Young & Muller, 2013). Education which does not make the second type of knowledge accessible to young people leaves them in the dark about the insights achieved most of all in academic research,

concerning both the natural and the social world. Competences alone may indeed fall prey to the 'emptying of content' criticized by Young (2009, p. 195).

While knowledge concerning such insights can be considered of value for good reasons, calling it powerful in itself raises a number of questions and objections from the perspective of competences. Even if a competence-oriented approach falls short of the task of providing criteria for the choice of contents to be treated in a certain subject area, it rightfully reminds educators of the need to never focus on content alone. What really counts in terms of competences always is the acquisition of abilities by the learners. At least in this respect, the competence-oriented approach leads to a general critical criterion concerning the selection of content to be taught. No content should be chosen for purposes of education which does not effectively support the development of pupils' abilities. In this respect the idea of powerful knowledge can even be misleading. To a high degree, the educational power of any knowledge depends on the learner. It never is a property of knowledge in itself, even if it also remains important, contrary to only competence-oriented persuasions in education, that only true knowledge will prove to be helpful in the long run.

Powerful Knowledge and *Conscientização*: Religious Education Based on Michael Young or on Paulo Freire?

Whoever from the field of education encounters the distinction between powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful will probably not think of Michael Young in the first place but more likely of Paulo Freire. Freire actually does not use exactly these terms but they strongly resonate with the core of Freire's educational thinking. When Freire ostracizes what he calls the 'banking concept of education', he seems to have in mind a transfer of the knowledge of the powerful to the learners who, through this knowledge, continue to be powerless and oppressed. Given the at least prima facie parallels between Young and Freire (and Young is certainly familiar with Freire's seminal work), it seems promising to

compare their approaches and to consider their meaning for religious education. Moreover, while the German religious education discussion has not come to include Young's work, there have been many references to Freire's work in this discussion (cf. Ahme, 2022). Before comparing Young's and Freire's approaches, at least a brief description of my reading of Freire's approach is needed, in correspondence to the description of Young's approach in Sect. 1. For this purpose, Freire's foundational book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the most suitable source. (Freire's approach has been described and discussed in many publications; Cruz, 2013, offers a brief overview as well as background information on the concept of conscientização.)

The 'banking concept of education' which Freire criticizes as oppressive refers to a distorted teaching situation. 'In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing' (Freire, 2005, p. 72). Freire offers a long list of characteristics of this concept which turns out to be a caricature of true education. Already his first two points are telling: '(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing' (p. 73). Moreover, the knowledge taught has no relationship to the lives of the pupils. Education carried out in this manner ends up to be rote learning of isolated and meaningless bits and pieces of knowledge.

Opposed to this, liberation-oriented education works as 'problem-posing' education characterized by 'cognition, not transferrals of information' (p. 79). This form of education is truly dialogical because the teacher does not act as authority: 'In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it' (p. 80). For Freire, in other words, liberation becomes the decisive perspective in determining the content of education. For him, 'true knowledge' acquired in the problem-posing mode is liberating: 'Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality' (p. 81). This obviously is the core of what Freire calls *conscientização*—becoming conscious of the truth behind

ideological, distorted and oppressive renderings of reality as cemented by the 'banking concept of education'.

Most importantly in this view, the knowledge in question can never be isolated from the lifeworld of the learners. Education must begin with asking about the thematic world in which the learners are living. In this respect Freire speaks of 'generative themes' which are rooted in this lifeworld understood as the 'thematic universe' of the learners (p. 97). It is important to note, however, that Freire is clearly aware of the limiting character and functioning of this lifeworld. He does not argue that education should be adapted to it in the sense of not transcending it. Instead he explicitly refers to the limiting function of generative themes which he therefore connects to 'limit-situations' and, even more importantly, to 'limit-acts' in the sense of overcoming such limitations (p. 102). In other words, education aims at the learners to develop a 'critical form of thinking about their world' in order to become able to transcend it and to ultimately change it (p. 104).

It is obvious that this understanding of education entails important consequences concerning the role of knowledge in education. 'In contrast with the antidialogical and non-communicative "deposits" of the banking method of education, the program content of the problem-posing method—dialogical par excellence—is constituted and organized by the students' view of the world, where their own generative themes are found' (p. 109).

From this brief summary of Freire's understanding, a number of commonalities and differences between Freire and Young become obvious. The main common point of these authors is their interest in true knowledge. Both are convinced that true knowledge must be the basis as well as the aim of education. Moreover, both agree that education must go beyond everyday knowledge. Yet at the same time, they come to very different conclusions concerning the question of how this knowledge should be embedded in education. While both envision education to be a transition from knowledge of the powerful to powerful knowledge, Young does not seem to be very interested in the process of transition itself. What counts for him is that powerful knowledge can indeed be acquired. Freire, however, assumes that this will not be possible without an appropriate process of knowledge acquisition which he describes as problem posing

and as based on the interplay between generative themes and limit-situations or limit-acts. The reason behind Freire's views is that the power of the knowledge of the powerful cannot be overcome unless this power is challenged and finally rejected by the learning person who must become, step by step, free from the authority of the teacher.

What does this mean for religious education? What about the role of knowledge in RE when viewed from the perspective of Young and Freire? As described above, Young's emphasis on the importance of powerful knowledge for education can be helpful in that it reminds us of the need to become clearer concerning the knowledge to be acquired in RE. Taking Freire's views in account as well on the one hand also confirms the need for true knowledge. Yet on the other hand, with Freire, there is a warning against focusing on content alone. In education, all content, including powerful knowledge, must be related to the lives of the pupils in such a way that it is not only powerful in itself but can also empower them, not only in general as Muller and Young expect in one of their later statements quoted above, but most concretely concerning their lives in general and specifically their social and material living conditions.

Freire's approach grew out of his work with the poor in Latin America in the 1960s. It can rightly be pointed out that the situation of today's pupils at least in Europe is quite different from that of the poor in Latin America. In any case the oppression from which they may have to be liberated, for example, in terms of consumerism, is not very obvious to them. Maybe one could suggest that it is the idea of generative themes and limit-situations which might be of help in this situation. Concerning the educational use of powerful knowledge this would mean that this knowledge must be connected to generative themes which, in turn, presupposes that educators first have to become able to identify such themes in the lifeworlds of the learners.

Conclusion and Perspectives for the Future

The discussion of the concept of powerful knowledge in this chapter made use of three different lenses—education as *Bildung,* competences and Freire's liberationist approach to education. The concept of powerful

knowledge clearly resonates with all of these perspectives while in turn, these perspectives can substantially add to the understanding of powerful knowledge and its potential role in RE. While the idea of powerful knowledge which really deserves to be handed on to future generations certainly is quite plausible from the perspective of religious education as well, it nevertheless must be closely connected to pupil-oriented forms of teaching. In the field of RE, the idea of powerful knowledge could otherwise lead back RE to the times of catechetics when a catechism with its set content was considered absolutely authoritative because it contained the core of the Christian faith. If one were to attempt to pass on even the most powerful knowledge in this manner, its power would definitely be lost on its way to the children and adolescents.

Conversely, the concept of powerful knowledge serves as a reminder of the neglected role of the topic of knowledge in the religious education discussion. This neglect has led to questionable ways of dealing with knowledge in RE. Obviously knowledge inevitably continues to play an important role in the practice of RE, yet academic religious education is in no position today to offer considered guidelines for the selection of this knowledge. At least in this respect, the diagnosis set forth by Richard Kueh quoted at the beginning of this chapter seems accurate: Contemporary RE is suffering from the lack of a clear knowledge base. As the discussion of powerful knowledge shows there is a need to identify contents and concepts which could be considered as powerful knowledge to be acquired in RE.

True knowledge has always been a promise of Christian education, for example following the Gospel of John 8:32: 'The truth will set you free'. True knowledge, even if understood in different ways, is also of core importance for Young's understanding of powerful knowledge as well as for Freire's view of liberation. Yet it has also become clear in this article that the identification of powerful knowledge in religious education remains an open question, at least at this point. Clearly not enough work has been done in this respect so this identification must remain a task for the future. At the same time, using powerful knowledge in RE will only make sense if it is (re-)interpreted in terms of *Bildung,* competences and problem-formulating methods in the sense of *conscientização.* There can be no liberation without truth but truth without liberation would be a contradiction in itself, not least in education.

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2

Powerful Knowledge in Ethics and Existential Questions: Which Discourses, for Which Pupils, in Which Contexts?

Christina Osbeck, Karin Sporre, and Annika Lilja

Introduction

In the Gospel of Matthew, the question is raised: 'For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?' (16:26 NRSV). It is possible to interpret the quotation as stressing that gaining the whole world is not necessarily useful to individuals. Despite all these resources, they may forfeit their lives. In a similar way, the question should be raised in relation to powerful knowledge (PK), in the social realist sense in which it is used by Young (2013): For what will it profit them if they gain

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all the PK in the world but are active in contexts with other hegemonic discourses so that neither their friends nor themselves see the point in this knowledge? In this chapter, a sociocultural perspective on learning combined with an empirical youth research perspective is put in dialogue with the social realism approach to powerful knowledge stressed by Young. The sociocultural perspective makes visible assumptions that are made about pupils and teaching contexts, and while not rejecting the possibility that there may be knowledge that by definition can be considered powerful and 'better', raises the question of whether this knowledge will be powerful in all practices (e.g. Wertsch, 1991). Teaching that does not reach the children cannot be considered meaningful, no matter how objectively powerful the knowledge in focus may be (e.g. Gericke et al., 2018). Instead, teaching with the potential to develop powerful knowledge must take into consideration the practices where particular pupils are active, even if it cannot limit itself to such a focus. In order to become powerful, knowledge must draw on a dialectical understanding of child and curriculum (Dewey, 1902).

From the need for context- and pupil-sensitive education follows a demand for a curriculum- and content-sensitive discussion. Potential PK must be discussed in relation to specific content areas. Here, the fields of ethics and existential questions, two areas under the Swedish umbrella subject religious education [*Religionskunskap* = knowledge of religions], from here on RE, will be the concrete examples. In relation to these areas, certain contrasting difficulties arise. In the case of ethics, there is an academic tradition of more than two thousand years to draw on. However, the philosophical and abstract character of academic ethics can make its re-contextualization complicated (Bernstein, 2000). Concerning existential questions, this has been a theme of Swedish RE since the 1960s (Sporre, 2022), but does not have an academic tradition to relate to, nor an agreed object of study and conceptual framework. For both areas, questions arise as to how the relationship between pupils' perspectives and the schoolwork can be created.

The *purpose* of this chapter is to argue for the importance of a dialectical perspective when discussing PK—a perspective that recognizes both child and curriculum.

Material and Method

The argumentation is elaborated in five parts. Firstly, the focus is directed towards the debate on PK. We start out by exploring and presenting the main characteristics of PK through analyses of a sample of texts in the field, especially Young (2013), Young and Muller (2013) and Muller and Young (2019). After this, some key objections, mainly by White (2018) and Carlgren (2020), are put forward. Finally, some approaches in the debate on PK in the field of RE are described.

Secondly, a sociocultural perspective on learning is presented and discussed in relation to PK.

Thirdly, knowledge concerning children's needs and interests in the fields of ethics and existential questions is addressed. Here we draw on three empirical research projects that we have pursued recently. Two of them are about ethics: *What May Be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to Be Taught in Compulsory School* (VR Dnr: 2014-2030), EthiCo I, and *Refining the Ethical Eye and Ethical Voice—The Possibilities and Challenges of a Fiction-Based Approach to Ethics Education* (Skolfi Dnr: 2018-00027), EthiCo II; and the third project, *The Child and Curriculum. Existential Questions and Educational Responses* (VR Dnr: 2018-03435), C & C, aims to generate knowledge about children's existential questions, both as expressions of their worldviews and as questions seeking knowledge that call for educational responses.

Fourthly, we discuss potential PK in the fields of ethics and existential questions, starting from understandings of the knowledge fields in terms of school curricula and interpretations of the areas from a Swedish perspective, and combining this with what we know about the needs and interests of pupils.

Fifthly, a concluding discussion ends the chapter, concerning what the presented lines of argument mean for the debate on PK, for RE research with a focus on ethics and existential questions, and finally for an implementation of teaching in these fields.

Powerful Knowledge—An Overview

In the discussions around PK, at least three main perspectives can be identified: firstly, that all pupils are entitled to knowledge; secondly, that there exists what can be called 'better knowledge'; and thirdly that the characteristics of PK can be identified in all subjects.

Pupils' entitlement to knowledge is what Young (2013) considers to be the question curriculum theory ought to focus on. The 'better knowledge' that the pupils are to access through their education is knowledge that is more reliable and thus nearer 'to truth about the world we live in and to what it is to be human' (2013, p. 107). Such knowledge exists in all fields, even if Young often models his discussion on the natural sciences. In the field of ethics, Young gives the example of Kant's ethics and the idea of duties as universalizable principles.

PK has certain characteristics. It is *specialized* knowledge, meaning that the knowledge comes from academic disciplinary contexts. It is *differentiated* from everyday life experience, and the conceptual boundaries of the academic disciplines distinguish school and everyday life (Young, 2013, p. 108). Everyday life concepts are concrete in nature and relate to specific contexts (Young, 2013, p. 110). School must aim at PK since pupils 'do not come to school to know what they already know from experience' (Young, 2013, p. 111).

When discussing PK in all disciplinary fields, Young and Muller (2013) make use of Bernstein's (2000) distinction regarding the degrees of *verticality* and *horizontality* of knowledge systems. Systems where new knowledge cumulatively builds onto earlier knowledge and simultaneously subsumes existing knowledge Young and Muller call vertical systems. Horizontality refers to other forms of relationships within knowledge systems. This, according to Young and Muller, can refer to parallel theories that may co-exist in an academic field, due to knowledge production also being context bound, for example, variation in historical narratives. Young and Muller argue that horizontal knowledge systems are found within the humanities and social sciences. This does not make them of less value than the ones characterized by verticality, found within the natural sciences and mathematics.

Another variation in forms of PK that is picked up by Muller and Young is the distinction between substantive and procedural knowledge. Not only the 'what', that is knowledge of a factual kind, needs to be taught in school but also the 'know-how' of a discipline. Here, Muller and Young point, for instance, to the importance of learning the use of concepts and the logic of arguments within a discipline. Such processes are different within a subject like history, for example, than in physics (Muller & Young, 2019)

Muller and Young (2019) stress that PK should be shared without limits, that is that it is a common resource, in contrast to knowledge kept in limited circles and used for domination (cf. knowledge of the powerful). PK is social and collective, a public good and consequently not a scarce good (pp. 199–204). Additionally, it has a transformative capacity and gives access to explanatory as well as imaginative power.

Key Objections

The debate on PK has been lively and influential. However, this does not mean that objections do not exist. Some opposition can be found, for example, in White (2018) and Carlgren (2020), where central themes concern firstly that PK has been discussed as *the* curriculum principle, although there are other perspectives that are important and need to be taken into account when it comes to curricula. Secondly, the clear distinction between everyday life concepts and scientific concepts has been questioned.

When White (2018) disagrees with the argument for making PK *the* curriculum principle, he objects to Young's thesis that all school subjects can be seen to be PK and in order to be so, must live up to the criterion of having systems of concepts, maintaining that systematic conceptual structures primarily exist in natural sciences and mathematics, and that Young's definition would exclude, for example, subjects such as literature and foreign languages. Neither, he argues, can the pursuit of theoretical knowledge be 'the first priority in school education' (White, 2018, p. 328). Instead, there are other central goals such as personal development and becoming a citizen in a democracy. In connection with the

discussion about what and how, Carlgren (2020) stresses the importance of 'powerful knowns' and 'powerful knowings', a discussion that she anchors in a practice-based framework for curriculum and school. Carlgren argues for the importance of a discussion where the forms of knowing—the powerful knowings—characterizing a specific subject are put in relation to overall educational goals. This may also involve a discussion on what needs to be known, about powerful knowns, even if powerful knowing should have priority, according to Carlgren.

Regarding the discussions around PK on the one hand and on the need for linking teaching to pupils' previous experience on the other, Carlgren argues for the need to do both (p. 325), which can be related to White, who rejects Young's sharp distinction between theoretical concepts and everyday knowledge. For instance, the learning of a foreign language operates via extending knowledge based on everyday concepts in pupils' own language to the foreign language, and teaching and learning through literature to a large extent also connect to the use of everyday concepts.

Discussions on PK in the Field of RE

Discussions on PK in the field of RE can be said to be of two kinds. Firstly, there is the discussion *explicitly* referring to the debate on PK. Secondly, there is and has been a discussion on what constitutes central concepts in RE, which can be understood as *implicitly* being about PK.

An Explicit Discussion

In the British RE context, Stones and Fraser-Pearce (2021) report on a project on truth claims in science and religion, suggesting that teaching may lead to epistemic injustice when a misdirected respect or tolerance leads to a reluctance to challenge others' opinions in the classroom.

In Sweden, Franck (2021a) has suggested and exemplified how threshold concepts could be a way to approach PK, and Osbeck (2020) has argued for a multidimensional ethical competence in Ethics Education

(EE) as part of PK. In line with Carlgren, this competence is described not only as theoretical but has clear procedural character (Sporre et al., 2020), and in that sense can be understood as powerful knowing. Through the narrative understanding of EE that Osbeck emphasizes (2020), human language, in line with White (2018), and contextual aspects play crucial roles in understanding what may count as PK in the field. A distinction between an everyday life discourse and a scientific discourse becomes hard to maintain here.

An Implicit Discussion

Without explicitly referring to PK, Niemi (2018) discusses threshold concepts such as strong knowledge in the RE field (cf. Franck, 2021b), emphasizing in particular the concepts of lived religion, world religion paradigm, emic/etic and orthodoxy/orthopraxy, Niemi considers these to work as keys in unlocking the subject.

Additionally, the importance of concepts and conceptual development can be understood as particularly strong in the Piaget-influenced Swedish national curriculum of 1980. Almén (2000) reflects about the meaning of this perspective in the RE context and presents four sets of concepts as central in the field: cultural, individual, traditional and confessional concepts.

In the British RE context, the 1980s also seems to have been an era for discussion on concepts and conceptual hierarchies. For instance, Grimmitt (1987) suggests some 'substantive religious categories', for example precedence, and how they may relate to 'secondary or derivative concepts' (p. 130) such as destiny, guidance and creation.

A Sociocultural Perspective on Learning

Rather than using more general applications of sociocultural perspectives on learning (e.g. Dysthe, 1996; Säljö, 2000; Wertsch, 1991), we use the perspective of Tappan (e.g. 1998, 2006), who develops his perspective in the field of moral development. For Tappan, who draws on Vygotsky and

Bakhtin, moral functioning is a core issue and is mediated through cultural tools, amongst which words, language and discourses are the most central ones. Consequently, moral development in such a perspective means expanding one's moral discourses. Language shapes our moral thinking, feeling, speaking and acting. A multitude of discourses and narratives make inner dialogue, as well as creative, nuanced and rich responses, possible—responses that always are formulated in specific contexts, in relation to utterances of others (e.g. Bakhtin, 1986).

In concrete terms, a central task in order to enhance moral development means facilitating conditions for development of discourses, specific discourses that have a bearing upon the issues at stake. According to Tappan (1998), a strong trust can be placed in practices where one meets others, narrates and tries out different voices, becoming a competent actor who develops competent ways of using moral discourses in moral acts. In addition, the stories that individuals read have potential to expand their repertoires of moral discourses. Reading also means experiencing, even if these experiences occur by means of signs (Tappan, 1998). However, the narratives that are encountered are often socially represented narratives, that is they are presented orally. Telling stories and thus exercising authorship is important, according to Tappan, since it means taking a moral position, imbuing the story with moral values and claiming authority and responsibility for the perspectives therein (Tappan, 1991; Tappan & Brown, 1989). Telling a story means hearing the story that one narrates and going into inner dialogue with this story (Tappan, 1991, p. 20). Through the practices of narrating, for example, in classrooms, the pupils are given opportunities to expand their repertoires of discourses. The teacher can challenge the pupils to develop moral authorship and authority, help them notice competent language-mediated moral functioning, but also encourage them to try out new discourses, for instance, theoretically motivated moral discourses like voices of care and justice (Tappan, 1998, 2006).

When saying that moral functioning can be understood as being linguistically mediated, it is important to see the broad and holistic character of a discursive perspective and avoid mixing it up with mastery of vocabulary

and terms. Discourses can be understood as 'a definite way of talking about and understanding the world (or a section of the world)' (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 7). As in speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986), content and form are intertwined in discourses. The form affects the content, and the content affects the form, and both are present in discourses as larger wholes. Nevertheless, concepts are important entities in discourses. To enlarge one's repertoires of moral discourses, one has to encounter different ways of talking and different narratives about phenomena at stake. An important task for teachers is to explore the main relevant discourses related to a specific issue and make sure that the pupils meet as many as possible of them. Working with a wide scope of narratives may be one way to achieve such an ambition. The narratives can in turn often be understood in conceptual and condensed terms, that is, on an abstract level, which also has bearing on a meta-understanding of the field in question.

So what does a sociocultural perspective on learning mean for PK? While accepting the idea of PK as specific, 'better' knowledge, which it is possible to apply more generally, we do not see it as necessarily differentiated from everyday knowledge. Furthermore, we consider it important to understand PK as involving discourses concerning both substantial and procedural knowledge. Ethical reflections and interpretations of life are done through language and discourses. The functionality of a discourse varies contextually and in that sense so also does the power of that discourse. There are discourses that are potentially meaningful and powerful to apply more generally, although this may appear impossible due to other discourses being hegemonic in these contexts. To try to apply such discourses in spite of this can mean not being heard, being ignored or being misunderstood. Since it can still be considered important to learn general, abstract and conceptually powerful discourses, a central task for school must also be to enhance practices involving new discourses and discursive change. However, this presupposes interest in and knowledge of the contexts in which pupils live their daily lives.

Pupils' Perspectives on Ethics and Existential Questions

The knowledge about pupils' need for and interest in ethical competence highlighted here comes from three empirical research projects. In the first, EthiCo I, group interviews with pupils have been carried out and shown that pupils express a need for an ethical competence involving at least four parts, to: identify a situation as ethical; investigate different ways to act and weigh pros and cons; carry out decisions; follow up on and take responsibility for one's decisions (Osbeck, 2018). The expressed needs for ethical competence were related to special themes that pupils considered ethically important. The most strongly emphasized themes were: peer relations in school, education and the future and politics (such as questions about migration and the environment). Obviously, these themes call for expert knowledge (Sporre et al., 2020).

In the Child and Curriculum project, we have made re-analyses of children's texts about existential questions, from the 1970s, collected by Sven Hartman and colleagues (e.g. Hartman, 1986). In addition, children today have responded to the same tasks. From the texts, what children ask and wonder about may be seen. Three frequently mentioned areas, in line with the EthiCo I findings, are social relations, environment and climate issues, and war (Osbeck et al., forthcoming).

Questions about social relations are often about exclusion, both concerning worries about being excluded and concerning how to handle situations when friends are excluded.

Concerning the environment, the children ask, for instance, about people's willingness to take responsibility. Why are people destroying the world and our environment, why do we not take the environment highly seriously when we know what is happening? The children seem to be familiar with some consequences of climate change and issues that they desire more knowledge about concern, for example, animals that risk being exterminated, how to produce substitute material for plastics and how to handle the consequences of elevated sea levels.

The texts also express more general reflections about the evil in people and about people's sense of responsibility, why must there be wars, will there be a third world war and if so, when will it come and how is one supposed to handle such a situation?

Potentially Powerful Knowledge in the Fields of Ethics and Existential Questions

Ethics

The Knowledge Field—Interpretations of Ethics

As the Swedish national curriculum for RE is a part of the nine years of compulsory school, ethics is taught to all pupils throughout their first nine years at school. In the international comparisons we have undertaken in EthiCo I, ethics in the Swedish curriculum has an emphasis on an argumentative and reasoning capacity, while, for instance, the curriculum of the province of Québec has a dialogical approach, actively involving pupils, and the Namibian one places pupils within a wider human context of culture and worldviews (Sporre, 2021). Other comparisons of curricula have shown how a focus on issues of social justice matters relating to intersectionality (race and gender issues) has been prevalent in Namibia, South Africa and Sweden, while a more general human rights approach has characterized curricula from California state and the Province of Québec (Sporre, 2020). None of these ethics curricula has to any considerable extent treated the issues of the environment or climate change (Sporre, 2020).

In line with how EE has been carried out internationally, the Swedish teaching has often been dilemma focused (e.g. Kohlberg, 1971), and frequently focused on abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty (e.g. Osbeck, 2009), cases that can be understood as showing differences between deontological and teleological ethics. However, it has also been criticized for not being sufficiently relevant, in contexts where the

importance of ethics teaching being based on pupils' questions is emphasized (e.g. Jie & Desheng, 2004).

One of the main findings from our EthiCo I project is the understanding of ethics as multidimensional (Osbeck et al., 2018). The conclusion is stated in opposition to the one-dimensional argumentative and reasoning competence highlighted in the Swedish curriculum. Instead, the EthiCo I project identifies—based on literature reviews and empirical research, as well as theoretical deliberations—seven dimensions in this ethical competence: being morally sensitive, being able to make moral judgements, identifying moral motives for action, acting, being informed/knowledgeable, being context-sensitive and being communicative (Osbeck et al., 2018). The dimensions can be understood to be in line with Tappan's sociocultural perspective on moral development, that is, resting on language and discursive repertoires.

Powerful Knowledge in Ethics

Having PK in ethics can, based on a sociocultural perspective on learning, be seen as having broad repertoires of moral discourses concerning relevant areas. Different issues demand different substantial knowledge. Here, we discuss PK in ethics using a three-part frame, where developing powerful moral discourses is considered in relation to three levels or arenas. Firstly, the arena of the children themselves, their specifically expressed needs, challenges and interests concerning concrete cases of ethical relevance. Secondly, the societal and global arena, involving issues that may be further away from the children, and to which the teacher needs to point in order to broaden their life worlds (cf. Biesta, 2022; Dewey, 1938). Thirdly, relevant moral discourses should be understood in relation to a meta-arena, a meta-understanding, where the children need to understand ethics, perspectives and analyses as general phenomena. This includes learning the meta-language of ethics, the linguistic tools through which one also can evaluate one's own reflections, perspectives and acts. PK, or here rather powerful discourses, cannot be reduced to only one of these three arenas.

An example of an area often paid attention to by the pupils is relationships. A concrete ethical problem may be how to handle being subjected to an injustice. Here, different discourses can be represented and contrasted, for instance, by means of the Bible's story about the prodigal son and Aesop's fable about the fox and the stork (cf. Osbeck, 2014). Moreover, the stories can be understood conceptually as involving forgiveness and revenge. In order to interpret another case where an individual has been unfairly treated, stories, discourses and concepts can be of value, but also knowledge about the third arena mentioned above. Here, one can put a meta-ethical reflection to work—in relation to the case and with help of the seven dimensions of ethical competence—and ask oneself questions about how the ethical problem in question can be understood (relevant information, alternative interpretations), how judgements can be made and how these judgements are justified (consequences, duties, values at stake, meaning of the specific context to the case).

Existential Questions

The Knowledge Field—Interpretations of Existential Questions

In international comparisons, the Swedish inclusion of existential questions in the national curriculum for the subject of RE in 1969 is unique (e.g. Ristiniemi et al., 2018). In curricula from 1969 and 1980, these existential questions were linked to pupils' own existential questions but over time, this focus on the pupils was replaced with a stronger focus on existential questions as expressed in religions and worldviews (Sporre, 2022). In the neighbouring Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark, more pupil-centred approaches are found today, with the Danish curriculum presupposing that the existential questions used should be the pupils' own (Sporre, 2022). In ongoing analyses, such a tendency to actively involve the pupils' questions may also be seen in the Berlin-Brandenburg curriculum. The prevalence of climate change issues as existential questions can be noted in the new Norwegian curriculum, but not in the other curricula studied (Sporre, forthcoming).

The sub-area 'existential questions' was shaped in the 1960s when Swedish society still had little experience of religious plurality, but when a secularist critique of religion had a strong presence (Lindfelt, 2003). As a response to this debate, the new approach was taken to RE, where it was viewed as a secular subject, with a greater emphasis on existential questions as a common ground for RE teaching. Everyone struggles with existential questions, and in this process, religions and worldviews may be supportive (Dahlin, 1998). Simultaneously, there have been critical objections suggesting, for instance, that this approach may give a twisted understanding both of what a religious tradition is and how existential questions arise. If they emanate from a person's sociocultural context, this can mean that religious traditions do not primarily provide answers, but can rather be seen as sources of existential questions (e.g. Almén, 2000; Grimmitt, 1987). If traditions are seen as being answers, there is a risk of life interpretation processes being made instrumental.

Even if the existential questions approach to RE in Swedish national curricula has been less prominent in recent years, one of the central aims of the subject is still to create conditions for pupils to develop a personal attitude to life and an understanding of how they and others are thinking and living (cf. Franck, 2021a; Sporre, 2022). From a disciplinary perspective, the knowledge area of existential questions has been related to what in Swedish theological faculties during the late twentieth century was called *tros-och livsåskådningsvetenskap* [knowledge of faith and worldviews], which came to replace systematic theology. To a large extent, the discipline was associated with Professor Anders Jeffner, who gave an influential definition of worldviews, in which both secular and religious ones were included.

Powerful Knowledge Concerning Existential Questions

From a sociocultural perspective on learning in the field of existential questions and understandings, having PK can be understood as having a broad repertoire of discourses concerning central existential areas. These discourses also include having access to and being contextually able to apply concepts in reflections, interpretations and analyses. The concepts and

discourses can, in line with our understanding of the field of ethics, be interpreted as relating to at least three arenas. Firstly, the arena of the children's immediate interests. Secondly, the societal and global arena, involving issues that may be further away from the children, and to which the teacher needs to point in order to broaden their life worlds. Thirdly, relevant concepts and discourses should be understood in relation to a meta-arena where the importance of understanding existential questions and life interpretations, as well as their relation to narratives and worldviews, is central. Here, a language through which the pupils have the opportunity to develop existential understandings is important. As an illustration, Grimmitt's description of how religions, worldviews and peer culture work as frames of references to mirror oneself in can be useful. In order to encourage such a process, Grimmitt has suggested exploring concepts such as identity, illumination, acceptance, evaluation and adjustment (1987).

Narratives and alternative narratives are important tools in acquiring broad repertoires of moral discourse, where both religious traditions and secular literary heritages constitute strong resources. Through the narratives, one gains access to new perspectives, new frames of references to put oneself in relation to. Having the opportunity to put oneself in relation to several such frames of references, such different discourses, could be understood as having PK in the field.

This can be exemplified by the novel *#together #outside [#tillsammans #utanför]* by Camilla Gunnarsson. The novel describes exclusion from the perspective of an 11- to 12-year-old girl. She is the one who always has to ask if she can take part in activities with friends. She gets tired of her situation and takes it out by being mean to her classmates on social media under a pseudonym. The whole thing is discovered, and the children get help from the adults to solve the situation. All parties are listened to without anyone being judged.

Based on our empirical youth research, we know that the novel describes a common situation that many children fear. The novel introduces and develops some concepts that describe emotions and experiences in relation to exclusion, like *humiliation*, *shame*, *feeling invisible* and *being a reserve.* The text can be seen as a resource for teaching PK, since the novel offers a description of and a solution to the situation, and in addition develops some central concepts that may be used not only in

relation to discussions about the book, but also in relation to bullying and exclusion in the children's own lives, as well as concerning bullying as a phenomenon. Here the concepts serve as a condensed form of the story and contribute language of a more abstract character (Osbeck, 2007). When a teacher is observant of central concepts in a text, the concepts can be used in the teaching as a short formula for a story, and conversely a story can be used as a pedagogical example of the concept. The stories load the concepts with meaning (Osbeck, 2007). In this way language, in form of both narratives and concepts, has possibilities for developing a shared knowledge which also sharpens the perception and can be described as powerful.

Concluding Discussion

Implications for the Debate on Powerful Knowledge

So, where has our discussion on PK, from a sociocultural perspective and based on our empirical research, led us? We find the perspective in Young's discussion on PK both insightful and important. We agree that there is 'better' knowledge, and underline the need for a school where all pupils have opportunities to appropriate such knowledge. We also agree that such knowledge often has a specialized and abstract form, which means that it is applicable in many contexts. Above we have described the importance of identifying, developing and learning central concepts through broadened discourses and narratives, and stressed the importance of what we called the 'third arena', where the pupils can develop a meta-understanding of the field. However, and in line with critique previously published (Gericke et al., 2018), the pupils must be met where they are, and their needs and interests must be respected. School must take the voices of children seriously (e.g. Sporre et al., 2022), and help them develop knowledge that empowers them in the context where they are active. School and teaching must take into account that Young's PK is not necessarily acknowledged as powerful in all contexts. The variety of pupils, and practices where they are active, should be considered. This also means that it is important to teach about widening of discourses,

how to challenge and change contextually hegemonic discourses and make room for alternatives and a multitude of voices, as this constitutes powerful procedural knowledge. School should not only help pupils to deepen their established perspectives; teaching must also widen the discourses of the pupils, point in new directions and develop tools to be applied in a wide range of practices. It must help pupils to use and practise new discourses, which presupposes a focus not only on curriculum but on child *and* curriculum.

Implications for the Debate on PK in RE: Especially Concerning Ethics and Existential Questions

Previous research shows that in the field of RE, there are findings of interest concerning Young's PK, both texts that directly refer to the debate and ones that do not refer to PK but have bearing on the debate. The latter focus, for instance, on central concepts in certain areas. However, concerning ethics and existential questions, previous research is insufficient. Our empirical research on children's perspectives constitutes an important contribution, since it makes clear which themes schools need to address in order to develop knowledge that can be shown as powerful for the pupils. Pupils need to be informed and knowledgeable in relation to these themes and they need to be given opportunities to widen their discourses on these themes. However, ethics and existential teaching also need to point towards other themes that pupils do not yet see as relevant, but which can work to develop them as human beings and citizens. It is an important question for further research in the field to discuss which are these themes that powerful teaching needs to address, and also what an adequate repertoire of varied discourses around each theme looks like. Furthermore, the central concepts and their possible structure also need to be discussed. In our presentation above, we have used a three-part frame for such discussions, where teaching and learning can be considered in relation to three arenas: the primary interests of the children, the societal and global arena and the meta-arena of the knowledge field. We suggest that all these arenas need to be given attention in further scholarly debate, involving both researchers and teachers. The debate needs to focus not only on the interests of the child but, in

both a theoretical and practical way, on what constitutes PK in the fields in question, that is, to focus on child *and* curriculum.

Implications for Implementation of Teaching in Ethics and Existential Questions

The emphasis on a need for development cannot be limited to scholarly debate and research. The development of the fields of ethics and existential questions must additionally take place in practice, that is, in the teaching itself. However, this should not only involve researchers informing teachers. As in EthiCo II, it must be done in close cooperation between researchers and teachers, where ideas are tried out, evaluated and reshaped together.

In EthiCo II, we deliberately worked through a fiction-based approach in order to expand the repertoires of moral discourses of the pupils. The point of departure was themes that we knew were of interest to the pupils, and the literature was chosen in order to contribute new discourses. From the conclusions we draw in this chapter, it might have been advantageous to work with larger text samples, introducing a wider variety of perspectives and discourses concerning the same issue. At the same time, the teaching was conducted deliberately based on the idea that discussions in relation to oneself, a small group and the whole class create a continuous inflow of new discourses. From the perspective of Young's PK, it could have been a strength to have discussed more thoroughly beforehand the central discourses of a specific theme and have ensured through the sample of texts that all these discourses were encountered and practised. Furthermore, in line with where we stand today, we also think that it would have been good to be clear about which concepts were to be developed through the teaching. Through the teaching, the pupils should have the opportunity to see how concepts can work as condensed narratives and meanings of concepts can be exemplified through narratives.

In sum, we see the need for further development work by researchers and teachers together in order to develop PK in all the three stated arenas of ethics and existential questions, both in Young's sense of the term PK

and in the widened sense that has been suggested here, through a socio-cultural and empirical youth research perspective. It is not the child *or* the curriculum that needs to be focused on in order to develop PK, but the child *and* curriculum.

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3

Powerful Knowledge in Non-denominational Religious Education: Some Considerations on the Relationship Between Curriculum and Pedagogy

Olof Franck

The argument that schools' teaching of religions and beliefs should be knowledge-based may seem to be an educationally as well as epistemologically uncontroversial position. What gives rise to critical discussion, with room for a fairly wide arena of arguments and positions, are questions about just what type of knowledge such teaching should pay attention to and convey, and in what way.

Both these questions are the focus of the field of religious education (RE) research, although I would argue that not least the *how* questions have come to play a particularly prominent role in contemporary research. Perhaps this applies particularly to the practice-oriented research conducted on RE in non-denominational contexts, where both challenges and opportunities regarding how a teaching that does not give way to

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either steering towards or positions of any specific religion or tradition are to convey and develop knowledge of traditions in which more or less strong, faith-based truth claims sustain and define the religious discourses that are highlighted (cf. Franken 2014; Berglund 2014; Franck, 2022).

The research on didactic strategies and methods in the context of teaching religions is rich and comprehensive. Much has also been written about the place and role of RE in a school that is part of a postsecular society where religion is becoming increasingly visible in public arenas (cf. Cush, 2020) and where religious arguments and positions are asserted and discussed in political and ethical debates (Franck & Thalén, 2020). How can, and should, the visibility of religion be acknowledged in a teaching characterized by objectivity? And how can a comprehensive and inclusive RE on, for example, potentially controversial and sensitive issues of faith and ethics, in which claims to truth and knowledge play a prominent role, be designed and developed (cf. Holmqvist Lidh (2016); Kittelman Flensner (2018); Flensner, 2020; Franck and Liljefors Persson (forthcoming))?

In this chapter I will discuss some challenges and opportunities when it comes to developing knowledge-based, non-denominational RE in a postsecular society, characterized by both strong secular currents and visible religious diversity. My starting point is the theoretical framework that Michael Young, in several publications together with Johan Muller, has developed with regard to the concept of powerful knowledge, which is worth examining as a conceivable base or platform for developing a factual and all-around non-denominational teaching of religions in a postsecular society.

Young has received criticism from various quarters for focusing unilaterally on the question of what kind of knowledge the school should provide or offer (cf. Gericke et al., 2018; White, 2018), with the result that the question of how this knowledge should be subject to instruction has been overlooked or completely neglected. There are, as I see it, important educational aspects to pay attention to in this criticism. At the same time, the criticism itself can risk developing in a one-sided and narrow-minded way. If the focus is decisively shifted from *what* to *how* questions when a discussion of knowledge-based RE is conducted, this may deviate from the conditions for designing and conducting an RE in which analyses of

the concepts of knowledge and knowledge development are given the central role they should have, given the importance of knowledge and truth claims in religious traditions both theoretically and practically, in both creeds and lived religion. It is this challenge that I want to discuss in the following: How can a conception of powerful knowledge express both a clear curricular view of knowledge and an educational application in which this view of knowledge is practised and developed within the framework of a knowledge-based, non-denominational teaching about religions? How can the *what* and *how* questions be viewed and analysed in light of each other, rather than being separated and kept apart as if the concept of knowledge-based RE should be understood in dichotomous terms? And how, in an RE context, can we understand the meaning of such *potentia* or *empowerment* as, according to Muller and Young, can follow from a teaching that lives up to the criterion of manifesting powerful knowledge (Muller & Young, 2019, 209)?

Powerful Knowledge: Significant Characteristics

In "Overcoming the Crisis in Curriculum Theory: A Knowledge-Based Approach", Young states that "powerful knowledge has two key characteristics and both are expressed in the form of boundaries":

- It is specialized, in how it is produced (in workshops, seminars and labs) and in how it is transmitted (in schools, colleges and universities) and this specialization is expressed in the boundaries between disciplines and subjects which define their focus and objects of study. In other words, it is not general knowledge. This does not mean that boundaries are fixed and not changeable. However, it does mean that cross-disciplinary research and learning depend on discipline-based knowledge.
- It is differentiated from the experiences that pupils bring to school or older learners bring to college or university. This differentiation is

> expressed in the conceptual boundaries between school and everyday knowledge. (Young, 2013, 108)

Powerful knowledge can thus be described as specialized, disciplinary and differentiated, and at the centre is the question of how the concepts through which these three characteristics operate may be conceived. One of their roles is to initiate and anchor such knowledge that transcends the past, everyday experiences of students and other learners. Another is to create a focus on a knowledge content that is powerful in that it concentrates the core of a subject at the same time as it gives children and young people an opportunity to understand how knowledge can be differentiated in relation to different subjects.

In later texts, Young, along with Muller, has discussed what can be described as systematic dimensions of powerful knowledge (e.g. Muller & Young, 2019). There is a structure and logic to how basic concepts are written out and related to others within a subject. Such a structure or logic can be vertical or horizontal. The distinction between vertical (or hierarchic) and horizontal reasoning, used by Muller and Young to describe the theoretical-methodological prerequisites for various subject-related processes in which powerful knowledge is described and expressed, is critically examined. The presence or absence of defined and well-delineated "conceptual ladders" for how supporting concepts function and are used determines whether a subject's knowledge processes can be characterized in terms of verticality or horizontality. History is used as an example of a subject in which a clear conceptual ladder is lacking and in which progression can be interpreted in different ways, unlike the subject of physics, for example, in which such processes follow clear lines of progression (ibid., 207).

An approach like this falls back on Bernstein's distinction between hierarchical or vertical and horizontal knowledge structures. In the former case, knowledge progression can be described as an integration of new knowledge into a coherent system, while in the latter case it is about the introduction of new perspectives without these having to be coherent with existing perceptions (Bernstein 1999). In both cases, one can speak of progression and the development of knowledge, but the structure here is thought to differ in essential points.

Coherence as a Bridge to Curricular Depth

Alfred Chapman has concisely summarized Young's conception of powerful knowledge as being "distinct from everyday common-sense knowledge derived from experience", "systematic" (which means that "the concepts of different disciplines are related to each other in ways that allow us to transcend individual cases by generalising or developing interpretations"), "specialized" (i.e. "produced in disciplinary epistemic communities with distinct fields and/or foci of enquiry") and "objective and reliable" (referring to the condition that its objectivity "[arises] from peer review and other procedural controls on subjectivity in knowledge production exercised in disciplinary communities") (Chapman, 2021, 9). This is a characteristic that seems to correspond well with what Young (2013) and Muller and Young (2013, 2015) place in focus in the theoretical framework they develop.

With reference to Peter Winch, Young and Muller present an interpretive approach whereby powerful knowledge is described in terms of *know how* (Muller & Young, 2019). With reference to Christine Counsell's discussion on subject-related knowledge processes as *infrastructures* (Counsell, 2018), in which relevant sets of facts and subject-related methods and models interact, they seem to interpret such processes as arenas where there is a pursuit of truth with regard to subject-specific prerequisites, aims and methods (cf. Young, 2008, 2010). A key concept here is *coherence*. Lists of soluble, related knowledge content do not contribute to but rather counteract a systematic and clear development of knowledge, with the "main consequence… [of sacrificing] depth for breadth" (Muller & Young, 2019, 205).

More concisely, they state that "the systematic nature of systematic knowledge lies not in a listing of the content only", which "results in a laundry list" of topics and items with no discernible order, and yields only a "splintered vision" and one devoid of coherence (Muller & Young, 2019, 205). It is this type of systematic, disciplinary and coherent structure that should characterize the curriculum. It is important to distinguish between everyday and specialized knowledge and to make this

difference and the structure of the latter clear to teachers, and by extension to learning students.

Muller and Young discuss "the crucial principle of curricular progression", namely:

> How should the content be sequenced and paced so as to represent the deep structure of a body of knowledge in its increasing complexity? (ibid., 210)

Regarding knowledge development, it

> must be sequenced and paced so as to deepen the appreciation of claims, evidence and argument, so that the inferential reach of learners is progressively deepened…The curriculum must first provide signposts to the structure of the subject before adepts are empowered to structure and expand the scope and reach of the pupils lost. (ibid., 210)

The subject-based processes in which knowledge development takes place in the pursuit of truth within the framework of interaction between subject-specific prerequisites, aims and methods can thus represent different forms of infrastructure. However, they all need to provide signposts that can demonstrate a coherent subject structure that allows for an understanding of the subject as a whole as well as of its parts.

Powerful Knowledge and Didacticizing in RE: Tentative Reflections

To what extent can Young and Muller's theoretical framework in terms of powerful knowledge contribute to an analysis of what a knowledge-based, non-denominational RE is, and in what way could it be developed in a didactic and practice-oriented perspective?

As we have seen, a basic idea of this framework is that the school's teaching should offer a disciplinary, specialized and systematized knowledge that transcends the everyday experience and the everyday knowledge that children and young people carry with them when they begin participating in the school's teaching. Through the subject knowledge,

the teaching should provide the conditions for development, and the young subjects should develop a powerful knowledge that allows them to act as knowledgeable subjects in relation to society and other subjects and, one should remind oneself, in relation to one's own opportunities to develop new knowledge. This could be seen as a question of empowering young people to exercise active civic knowledge based on subject-related knowledge (cf. Muller & Young, 2019, 209), a knowledge that can be understood not only in a national but also in an international, global sense.

The theoretical framework mentioned here has been the subject of in-depth discussion over the past decade. An example is the criticism by Gericke et al. (2018) of Young's "distinction between curriculum and pedagogy" (ibid., 431), as well as their arguments for how a "didactization" of knowledge, using community-oriented topics as an example, should be implemented through transformational processes (ibid., 432 ff). They say that they are positive about that Young is highlighting the need to focus knowledge issues in relation to education and teaching, but criticize him for not in any clear way tying curricular knowledge content to questions about how this content should be subject to teaching. And they quote Young's argument that curriculum and pedagogy should be separated:

> It is teachers in their pedagogy, not curriculum designers, who draw on their everyday knowledge in helping them to engage with the concepts stipulated by the curriculum and to see their relevance…the knowledge stipulated by the curriculum must be based on specialized knowledge developed by communities of researchers. This process can be described as curriculum recontextualization. (ibid., 432; Young, 2015, 97)

It is in teaching that the powerful knowledge stated in the curriculum is enacted; it is there that its power is made visible and available to students, which can lead to an empowerment that constitutes a goal to focus on the concept of knowledge in teaching.

A main objection to Gericke et al. may be that the processes they advocate actually risk instrumentalizing the concept of "knowledge" in relation to teaching and that in their eagerness to let the *how* questions be considered they risk downplaying and neutralizing the importance of the *what* questions for deepening knowledge processes. These "didacticizing"

processes may even risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater. If the question of what knowledge in a given subject context is or can be is answered through references to how this knowledge can and should be the subject of teaching, the very core of the theoretical framework in which the concept of powerful knowledge constitutes a basic platform can be interpreted in didacticizing terms. This would be unfortunate. It would also be an interpretation that paints a misleading picture of this concept.

It is not that the *what* questions are not at all given attention and an important role in the development of knowledge. According to the authors mentioned, it is fundamental that "powerful knowledge" as a content of knowledge be treated relationally in accordance with the didactic triangle: what happens to this content, for example, in the negotiations that take place in classrooms between teachers and students over how subjects should be understood:

> Taking the model of the didactic triangle into consideration, we claim that to be able to discern powerful knowledge at the classroom level, we need to empirically investigate teachers' and students' understandings of the content knowledge and not just take as our point of departure the disciplinary knowledge itself. In previous research inspired by the didactic tradition, it has become clear that the didactic triangle might be used as a tool in more in-depth micro-studies focusing on the act of content negotiations between the teacher and the students. This is a process in which both parties are important and where the goal is to reach a (common) understanding of the content knowledge. (Gericke et al., 438)

At the heart of the criticism of Young's presentation of powerful knowledge is the concept of transformation, which can be related to not only a classroom level but also to a societal and an institutional level:

> Transformation…is defined as an integrative process in which content knowledge is transformed into knowledge that is taught and learned through various transformation processes that take place outside and within the educational system at the individual, institutional and societal levels. (ibid., 432)

At the societal level, events and changes affect what can be perceived as powerful knowledge and as important to focus on in education and teaching. A concentration on the very concept of knowledge has been replaced with an interest directed towards individual learners' need to develop knowledge and competencies.

At an institutional level, changes are taking place in terms of the focus of education and goal conceptions. Academic disciplines and school subjects have differentiated goals, whereby that of the latter, unlike that of the former, is not to create new knowledge. With reference to Biesta's three knowledge arenas—socialization, qualification, subjectification—it is argued that the transformation of powerful knowledge at an institutional level can be viewed as filtered through the triad; that is, the content knowledge needs to be adapted to the educational goals at hand (ibid., 432).

It can be said that the concept of powerful knowledge is in need of relational analyses with respect to transformations at the three arenas mentioned above. However, it is difficult to see that Young's representations of powerful knowledge must generate a sharp separation "between curriculum and pedagogy". In fact, it can be said that Young and Muller express in their texts an interest in how powerful knowledge can be understood in relation to education and teaching—but without necessarily allowing the analysis itself to be relational. Identifying a knowledge content as powerful is one thing; exploring what empowering teaching of this content might entail is another. However, this does not mean that the two analyses would not have anything to do with each other but rather that it may be important to keep their respective implementation and goals separate.

Looking at RE in a Swedish curricular context, I will give an example here.

RE: The Swedish Example (II)—The Christian Heritage

Today's non-denominational RE is taken by Swedish students from Year 1 in compulsory school to upper secondary school, where a course in the subject is compulsory and where two more are offered. It may seem

strange that the study of religions has such a continuous presence in a country that, for more or less good reason, is often described as one of the world's most secularized. This description is likely based to a not insignificant extent on Swedes' stances on issues related to religion, ethics and values found in the World Values Survey and on its "cultural map", on which the country is placed as a lonely atoll up in the right corner, representing a high degree of individualism, absence of religious governance and an emphasis on individuals' self-realization (Inglehart and Wessels 2005).

There are reasons to discuss this image of Sweden, not least with regard to the presence of religion and religious voices that in recent times—which have been described as postsecular—can be identified in social contexts and public debate (cf. Franck & Thalén, 2020).

A fundamental reason why RE has a prominent role in the Swedish school, where non-denominational teaching constitutes an ideological and educational axiom, is that it has its roots in the denominational subject of Christianity (Christianity or Christianity knowledge) that stopped being taught in the mid-1960s. The cultural, ideological and political currents of the time long influenced the content and form of this denominational subject, which was considered fundamental in the public school of the past. In 1951 the Law on Religious Freedom was established, and discussions of the subject of Christianity brought to life processes of change that eventually led to the subject being replaced with the non-denominational "religious knowledge", which translates here as RE.

The subject of Christianity had a clear, theologically based content in which Christian doctrine formed a given base, from further back in time as it was mediated by Luther's Catechism. It was considered important that Swedish children and young people be taught the basics of what was perceived as the religion that represented justified claims to truth, and here representatives of the State Church at various levels played significant roles in the school's activities. Having knowledge of Christian creed was also perceived as a basis for developing morality and a life in accordance with what was described as a Christian ethic. Knowledge of the truths of the Christian faith was considered to provide a foundation for a life lived not only in accordance with a theologically well-entrenched doctrine, but also in accordance with a Christian ethic that reflects

divinely sanctioned moral rules and attitudes. Knowledge and moral education were thus followed within the framework of teaching the subject of Christianity (cf. Hartman, 2002).

If one wants to use the terminology used in the theoretical framework with powerful knowledge at its core, one could perhaps describe the content and goals of Christianity as the former being in the religiously hegemonic context of accepted truths, while knowledge of these truths would constitute *the empowerment* that students need to be able to live an intellectually and morally satisfying life. The content is (theologically) specific, disciplinary and systematic, and provides the conditions for shaping life in accordance with basic Christian values—which, at least further back in the subject's history, was seen as the primary goal (ibid.). It was not for nothing that one's grade in Christianity was initially shown at the top of the list of all the subject grades.

An increasing secularization of Swedish society in cultural, ideological and political arenas, among other things, has contributed to the image whereby, in line with the cultural map presented in the World Values Survey, Sweden is often highlighted as a secular or secularized—or even secularist—society. This picture needs to be problematized, as mentioned, but it gives no further expression to important images of how the importance of Christianity has diminished in both people's lives and relationships, or of its importance as a power factor.

Today, neither theologians, priests nor religious organizations control which subjects students should study or how teaching about religions should be designed. The "knowledge of the powerful", to use Young and Muller's expression, sits instead with political and administrative powers. In the work of designing school curricula, the National Agency for Education engages subject experts and researchers in relevant subjects, and today there are also opportunities for organizations and individuals, religiously engaged or not, to submit comments on proposals that have been published. But there is no formal possibility for representatives of either Christianity or other religious traditions to direct or influence the decisions made.

A collective concept in the school's governing documents is democratic values or the democratic foundation of values. Just as the Christian doctrine of faith represented an ideological basis for such a knowledge

and moral base for which the school was considered to be responsible, the foundation of values can be said to represent a basis for a knowledge-based as well as ethical framework for the personal development of children and young people to allow them to participate in the life of society on democratic grounds as active citizens. It could be said that this goal of teaching and education is the empowerment that serves as an intended goal for such development.

In accordance with the analysis by Gericke et al. (2018), it is conceivable that what has happened in the transition from denominational Christianity to non-denominational RE is a "transformation" at least on a societal and an institutional level. However, this is true only to a certain extent. The fact that the hegemonic anchorage in Christian faith and tradition has been replaced by a secular, democratic, value-based grid does not mean that all the parts that were considered important knowledge in the past have been purged. As we will see, Christianity also plays a supporting role in the non-denominational syllabus of RE, but within a cultural-historical framework.

It is true that the syllabus in RE includes elements that—for various, not least temporal reasons—did not find a place in the corresponding documents concerning Christianity. At the same time, there is room for both Christian doctrine and what is described as Christian ethics. The goal of teaching in RE is not to proclaim supposed Christian truths but rather to provide the conditions for today's students to be able to understand the role Christian faith and tradition have historically played—and still do for many people today. Corresponding knowledge about other traditions that fall under the category of "the world religion paradigm" is also given a clear place in the syllabus, while, for the reasons discussed, it is stated that Christianity should receive special focus (cf. Franck, 2022).

Thus, the question arises as to how it is that a specific, disciplinary and systematic knowledge of both Christian and other forms of religious belief and tradition in a secular, non-denominational context appears to be attributed to a characteristic that potentially satisfies specified criteria for being powerful.

Let us see what such knowledge means, before analysing the conditions for answering the previously posed question of how a conception of powerful knowledge can give expression to both a clear curricular view of

knowledge and an educational application in which this view of knowledge is practised and developed within the framework of a knowledge-based, non-denominational teaching about religions.

RE: The Swedish Example (II)—The Non-denominational Paradigm

Religious education (RE) is the unifying subject designation used to denote both more and less formalized teaching about religion and religious traditions. As can be seen in the literature, the variety of concrete examples of syllabi and teaching methods is extensive (Rothgangel). The Swedish subject of religious studies literally means "knowledge of religion", but is translated in the English version of the curriculum as "Religion".

The Swedish curriculum states:

> The school should be open to different ideas and encourage their expression. It should emphasise the importance of forming personal standpoints and provide opportunities for doing this. Teaching should be objective and encompass a range of different approaches. All parents should be able to send their children to school, fully confident that their children will not be prejudiced in favour of any particular view. (Skolverket, 2018, 6)

The syllabus in RE that will come into use beginning in the autumn semester of 2022 stipulates already in its introduction what kind of knowledge is to be paid attention to in teaching:

> The teaching in the subject of religious studies should aim for students to develop knowledge of religion and outlook on life in Swedish society and in different parts of the world. Through teaching, students will gain an understanding of how people in different religious traditions live with and express their religion in different ways. Students should also be given the opportunity to reflect on what religion and outlook on life can mean for

> people's identity and how their own starting points affect the understanding of religion and outlook on life. (Skolverket, 2021)[1]

It is important to note that it is not a question of purely conveying knowledge. Rather, teaching should provide the necessary incentives for students to develop subject-related knowledge of, as well as an understanding of, religion, philosophy of life and ethical diversity:

> The teaching should comprehensively highlight what role religion can play in society and how social conditions affect the development of religions and other views of life. Through the teaching, students will gain knowledge about how Christian traditions have affected Swedish society and how the role of Christianity in social life has changed over time. The teaching should stimulate students to reflect on different life issues and ethical approaches, and give them tools to allow them to analyze and take a stand on ethical and moral issues. In this way, the teaching should contribute to students' opportunities to develop a personal attitude toward life and a readiness to act responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings. (ibid.)

Policy-based writing like this can, naturally enough—and should—raise critical questions. What kind of knowledge are students expected to be able to develop after participating in RE teaching? The syllabus lists core content that relies on knowledge of religions, beliefs and ethical models such as rule and consequence ethics, but little or nothing is said about how the teaching should be carried out. Pedagogical methods and didactic choices are conspicuous in their absence. This means that teachers themselves, hopefully in collegial collaboration, are to develop pedagogical platforms and didactic strategies for a knowledge-developing RE.

How should a knowledge of the non-denominational subject of religious studies be perceived as systematic, disciplinary, specialized, objective and reliable? And is there a contribution to the empowerment of children and young people concerning the areas of life and society that are highlighted in the domains of this subject?

[1] The new syllabi in Lgr22 are not yet available in English translation. The following quotations and excerpts from the syllabus of RE have been translated by the author.

The current syllabus states that students, through the teaching, should be given "conditions to develop"

- knowledge of religions and other views of life and of different interpretations and varying practices within them;
- the ability to critically examine issues relating to the relationship between religion and society; and
- the ability to reason about ethics, moral issues and life issues from different perspectives (ibid.).

Here, the goals of teaching span wide fields, and one can easily get the impression that RE has a content that is richly faceted and comprehensive and is far from being characterized as, for example, "systematic", distinct, disciplinary and specialized. Can the subject be at all considered to meet the basic criteria for powerful knowledge?

Here, however, one should recall that the three areas based on which the subject's core content is structured—Religions and other outlooks on life, Religion and society and Ethics and life issues—rely on previous knowledge within academic subjects that represent important parts of the discipline of religious studies, for example, history of religion, sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, psychology of religion and philosophy of life. Thus, there is a bridge between academia, policy level and school teaching.

This bridge can take different forms and expressions, but here, as I have done in other contexts (e.g. Franck 2021), I would like to underline the importance of continuous communication between researchers and teachers regarding current research and current experiences of teaching. Such communication can create the conditions for teaching in RE to be carried out on a scientific basis, and for the research that is developed to some extent to capture and connect with experiences and knowledge anchored in the RE teaching classroom.

In the three areas in the syllabus for RE one can find, for instance, "central ideas in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism", "conflicts and consensus between different religious and secular views", for example on issues of religious freedom, sexuality and the view of women's and men's roles, and "analysis of and reflection on ethical issues

based on students' own arguments as well as on interpretations within religions and other views of life and based on ethical models. Such questions may, for example, concern freedom, justice and solidarity" (Skolverket, 2021).

These and other elements listed in the three areas can be perceived as being justified in relation to the goals and purposes of the school's RE, cited above. There is a strong knowledge dimension here: Students should learn both about the place and role of religion in different societies and in people's lives, and about what individual religions and beliefs represent when it comes to beliefs, ethical attitudes and practices. There is also a strong educational dimension, whereby democratic individuals as well as collective values are given space for reflection and analysis. One idea seems to be that RE students should develop knowledge of and respect for religious and life-view diversity, at the same time as the teaching inspires personal reflection on life, meaning, values and morality. The empowerment that can thus be developed can be seen in the light of "students' opportunities to develop a personal attitude toward life and a readiness to act responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings".

One way to interpret the central content of the Swedish syllabus for RE is to perceive it as a curricular platform for taking into account the places of religions, views of life and ethical attitudes, sometimes more and sometimes less harmonious in relation to each other, in a society characterized by diversity. Both conflict and consensus between them are studied; both critical arguments and analytical paths to understanding similarities and differences in how religions and views of life through the voices of their followers make themselves heard in social debate and in everyday relationships should be noted in the teaching. Christianity plays a prominent role in the syllabus with regard to Swedish history, which has largely been characterized by Christian norms and ways of thinking. All of this, according to the interpretation I now choose, can be perceived as dimensions of a powerful RE knowledge. And here, apropos of the criticism by Gericke et al. of Young for separating curriculum and pedagogy, I want to emphasize that it is important to direct focus towards the content of knowledge itself, taking into account, for example, current religious studies and ethical research.

This focus, of course, in a next step, with the help of teachers needs to be "didacted" in the sense that it is made accessible and relevant to students who participate in the teaching. But it is not this teaching that should control what content should be counted as "powerful". In the contemporary postsecular society characterized by diversity, it is fundamentally important that the subject of RE (just like other subjects) be knowledge-based and provide space for current research. The areas of knowledge identified above as representative of RE are, naturally, not written in stone. For example, in philosophy of religion or history of religion or ethical research, movements take place in which new and previously untested perspectives and hypotheses are investigated, interpreted and developed. Such movements need to make their mark on the content reflected in the syllabus on RE. These movements are important because they provide an opportunity to approach the teaching of religions, beliefs and ethics in a reliable and well-entrenched way. They are also important for attempts to identify subject didactic strategies for knowledge-based RE teaching.

The shift from Christianity to RE, described above, can certainly be seen as an example of the type of social and institutional transformations that Gericke et al. discuss. Meanwhile, a third type of transformation they highlight—"transformation at a classroom level" (ibid., 436)—appears to run the risk of being interpreted in a way that ties the epistemological, social realistic issue too closely to issues involving strategic, pedagogical processes with an aim of offering students the conditions for practising an *empowerment* that seems to have a great deal to do with the *use of the knowledge they have developed*. Meanwhile, in analysing the concept of powerful knowledge one needs to attend to the distinction between curriculum on the one hand and pedagogy on the other—not because they have nothing to do with each other, but because losing focus on each of these poles risks creating uncertainty as to the content of the two parts of the concept: "powerful" and "knowledge".

Transformation at the Classroom Level

Gericke et al. approach the *how* question from a "German/Nordic research tradition of didactics":

> The representation of teaching content in a teaching situation should not be exclusively framed as a question of how—as a methodological and/or pedagogical issue, as proposed by Young (2015). The matter of how is only part of a bigger, more complex process of transformation. The answer to the how question is dependent on the answers to the other didactical questions: what, why, for whom and when? We understand these questions to be essential when discussing the process of transformation at the classroom level, and essential when discussing powerful knowledge. At the classroom level, the teacher, and to some extent the students, become actors in the process of defining powerful knowledge. (ibid., 436)

This definitory process can be understood in relation to the didactic triangle, which is thought to show how the three parameters of teachers, students and content in mutual relationships can be perceived to relate in ways that provide answers to the questions of how knowledge should be subject to teaching as well as just what type of knowledge content comes into question. Teachers have their interpretations of the content while students may have different conditions for interpreting and understanding what can be described as content, and this means that all three parts of the triangle play an active role in the transformation that takes place in the classroom (ibid., 437). Gericke et al. conclude that:

> Taking the model of the didactic triangle into consideration, we claim that to be able to discern powerful knowledge at the classroom level, we need to empirically investigate teachers' and students' understandings of the content knowledge and not just take as our point of departure the disciplinary knowledge itself. (ibid., 438)

It is of course undeniable that the disciplinary knowledge of the subject of religion—just like in other subjects—needs to be adapted according to pedagogically successful strategies in order to be subject to

meaningful and constructive teaching. Moreover, it is hardly necessary to point out that both teachers' and students' preconceived, more or less well-founded, conceptions of the different parts of the subject of religion regarding religion, ethics and life issues have a bearing on how the teaching can and should be developed (cf. Franck 2021a).

However, the picture provided here seems to imply some kind of negotiating situation that concerns not only *how* but also *what* issues. It is not an obvious or uncontroversial position. As emphasized above, the post-secular discourse that characterizes Swedish society presents challenges for a non-denominational RE. When the diversity of approaches to and argumentative expressions regarding religious and ethical pluralism is strong, it is important that this topic stands on a steady epistemological and scientific basis. When strong currents that challenge research and scientific approaches with reference to, for example, "alternative facts" and conspiracy theories of various kinds, on dubious grounds and with ill-founded arguments and positions, research in religious studies disciplines needs to be given a justified space in school-based discussions of didactic strategies. Research has shown that RE teachers experience uncertainty about how knowledge-based and relevant RE should be designed (Sjöborg & Löfstedt, 2018). It is not only *how* questions that these teachers highlight; the *what* questions also seem significant in this context. How can one teach about religions, life issues and ethics in a way that is both disciplinarily reliable and relevant to contemporary children and young people?

For Muller and Young, the school's pedagogical processes are not about creating new knowledge but rather "enacting" the knowledge that is expressed in the curriculum and rooted in subject-oriented research. This is the task of the teacher. It is an important task in which, as Biesta has emphasized, something that transcends the teaching situation and strikes deeply in students as something significant can occur and provide new perspectives (cf. Biesta, 2013, 26). The conditions for such a transcending insight cannot be merely pedagogically satisfactory; they also need to be formulated with reference to curricular-prescribed knowledge, which in turn rests on an established, scientific foundation.

Some of the scientific disciplines that appear relevant in relation to RE have previously been indicated. These are mainly characterized by what is

described in Muller and Young's writing as horizontal infrastructures that are sometimes close to each other and sometimes deviate from each other's basic structures. A reflection of such infrastructures can be seen in the Swedish syllabus for non-denominational RE. The elements to be included in teaching the subject, which are listed under the three areas of knowledge (Religions and other outlooks on life, Religion and society and Ethics and life issues), seem to be possible to interpret as parts of what Young and Muller describe as a coherent approach. It is great and important work for teachers to enact these areas of knowledge and their parts in a way that "transcends the teaching situation" and adds new dimensions of knowledge that are anchored in available disciplinary, scientific knowledge.

Bildung-Related Perspectives

It is not only a question of making available to students specific theoretical knowledge of, for example, the theologies and practices of world religions, of deontological and consequence-based ethics or the selection of life issues that have been shown to be frequent among children and young people. It is equally about students being able to understand the existential and ethical significance of such knowledge and the notion that they should develop an ability to see and practise this meaning in relation to their personal life together with others. It is about being able and daring to ask basic questions about knowledge and meaning, responsibility and obligations, value and community, faith, belief and knowledge.

It is, one might say, a question of Bildung—perceived in line with how Carlgren (2020) discusses this concept in terms of two-dimensionality. In reference to Dewey and Bentley,[2] she says:

> The distinction between knowledge as something that is known and knowledge as the knowing of this known opens up a new dimension as compared

[2] Dewey, J. & Bentley, A. (1949/1989). Knowing and the Known. The later works 1949–1952, 16, pp. 1–280. Southern Illinois University Press.

> to the distinction between knowing that and how or between theoretical and practical knowledge. (Carlgren, 2020, 331)

Carlgren suggests instead, after a critical comment on a proposal in Lambert (2014)[3] for "an educational capability approach" (ibid., 332), that an alternative might be to "describe subject-specific capabilities that follow from subject-specific ways of knowing", capabilities that "correspond to the Bildungsgehalt of the school subject, i.e. to the cultivating aspects of it" (ibid., 332).

This is an approach that is well worth analysing more closely in relation to the topic of RE, whether this refers to denominational or non-denominational frameworks. In a Swedish context, as I have pointed out in another context, Bildung-related dimensions are included in the syllabus for RE (cf. Franck, 2021b, 2022). This syllabus is based largely on subject-specific "knowns", but there are also expressions of how the corresponding "knowings" constitute important parts of teaching the subject.

Carlgren's critical reasoning about a one-sided focus on "theoretical" knowledge, which can lead to a reductionist, rationalist view of knowledge (ibid., 329ff), needs to be taken seriously. In my earlier criticism of Gericke et al., however, I also wanted to point out the risk entailed by their approach in that it can also land in a reductionism; but a reductionism that implies that, in teaching, the subject-specific "known", rooted in relevant and reliable research, is not given the place it needs to have in order to offer students a theoretical framework that can give the teaching depth, and that can pave the way for transcending knowledge, both verbalizable as well as "tacit" (cf. Carlgren, 326).

A two-dimensional interpretation of how the concept of Bildung can be understood by allowing room for both "knowings" and "knowns" within the framework of a transactional educational process seems to be a well-motivated and epistemological, as well as pedagogically potent, platform for further discussion on the development of the subject of RE.

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[3] Lambert, D. (2014). Curriculum thinking, "capabilities" and the place of geographical knowledge in school. *Syakaika Kenkyu (Journal of Educational Research on Social Studies)*, 81, 1–11. [Google Scholar]

Concluding Remarks

Both scientifically based and existentially relevant RE needs to have a focus on both subject-specific knowledge and subject-specific capabilities. In the foregoing, with regard to the Swedish non-denominational subject of RE, I have shown some basic considerations, through which knowledge that is disciplinary, distinct and systematic is fundamental in order for students to be offered, through teaching, a reliable basis for developing what Muller and Young describe as empowerment, a kind of basis for reflection and action in the domains covered by the scope of the subject.

These considerations are not to be understood as advocating such a dichotomization of curriculum and pedagogy as Gericke et al. (2018) attribute to Young. Incidentally, I have also argued in the foregoing that it is doubtful that Young actually represents such a pure stance.

But I have also argued that it is important that both the *what* and *how* questions be given their respective legitimate places in the analysis carried out in teaching in general and in RE specifically. Not least when it comes to non-denominational RE in postsecular, epistemologically ambiguous teaching contexts, the writing of teaching content is fundamentally important. This writing should serve as a bridge between the school subject of RE and the scientific disciplines in which it can be said to have an academic basis. There should also be implications for how the conceptualizations of subject didactics and their specialized research fields are to be developed.

Such a stance should also be continuously portrayed within the framework of teacher education. One consequence of this stance is that teachers and researchers, in their respective roles, need to meet and communicate; and this communication should allow for analyses of both "knowings" and "knowns". Such analyses can help in elucidating and exploring the meaning and relevance of powerful knowledge in RE. They can also provide important dimensions of what Muller and Young describe as *empowerment*, not least in terms of what Carlgren calls "subject-specific capabilities".

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4

International Knowledge Transfer in Religious Education and the Debate on Powerful Knowledge

Peter Schreiner

Introduction

The project on International Knowledge Transfer (IKT) in Religious Education (RE) is a scholarly project that contributes to the idea that religious education should become an integrated field of research on an international level. It deals with different types of knowledge and asks: What exactly is meant by "knowledge" in religious education? And to what degree is knowledge in religious education transferable or even universal? IKT is not specifically a project on what knowledge is taught in the classroom of RE but more on the need for international cooperation in the field of religious education and for transfer of knowledge. The point of departure of this chapter is that there are several aspects in the IKT project that can be related to the debate of the concept of Powerful

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Knowledge (PK) with a special emphasis on Religious Education (RE) as a school subject in most European countries. A first aspect is that "knowledge" is central to both projects and maybe some overlapping concerns of how the term is used can be identified. A second aspect is that the central questions of the IKT project "What kinds of knowledge are transferred?" and "Is there knowledge in RE that can be applied internationally?" are also relevant for the debate on PK for RE. If knowledge is "powerful", transfer and international reputation could be productive. A third aspect is that both projects stimulate the discussion about the place and value of knowledge in teaching and learning in school.

For both projects the context of RE matters. It is shaped by the fact that, on the one hand, education and religious education are strongly rooted in different cultural or national contexts (cf. Schreiner 2018a); on the other hand, trends of internationalization and globalization are obvious and influence the domains of education, religious education and their relation to research. In both domains, international projects and networks prove the surplus of a development towards more internationalization as is also confirmed by this book.[1]

The two mentioned projects are therefore influenced by developments that go beyond national concerns and manifest a European and international dimension. This includes a trend of marginalization of RE as a school subject irrespective of the national or local approach of RE (cf. Schweitzer, 2021; Schreiner, 2020), developments of a re-nationalization (example of Brexit; Bergmann, 2017; Brøgger et al., 2022) which question international cooperation, an irritation concerning content and aims of RE—closely connected to the trend of marginalization—and finally an increasing global governance in education and a lack of recognition of RE in studies, projects and statements of international organizations. In this situation where RE is contested—for different reasons—the aim of high-quality teaching is introduced as a request and a sustaining marker for the future development of RE (cf. Ofsted, 2021; Schweitzer, 2020). This aim needs a solid academic basis and a more integrated field of research than it exists today. Also, the question on how teaching of religions can and should be designed and developed is important here. A

[1] Examples of international initiatives are introduced in Schreiner (2012, pp. 69–76).

leading perspective of this chapter is to argue for religious education as a task of the school and for "religions friendly concepts of education" based on a comprehensive concept of education including the existential perspective.[2]

Firstly, some contexts of RE for both projects are introduced. Then the project on International Knowledge Transfer in Religious Education is briefly presented. I will elaborate the discussion on Powerful Knowledge in Religious Education, and finally, the two initiatives are discussed with a focus on common concerns and challenges.

Contexts

This part introduces contemporary contexts or perspectives that influence the situation and discussion on Religious Education as a school subject in Europe. It is based on the concluding chapter of the book on IKT (Schreiner & Schweitzer, 2021b, p. 264f.) and mentions issues that need further research. The analysis argues that these points are relevant for both the IKT initiative and the discussion on PK in RE.

The *first context* refers to the observation that religious education is in a crisis or indeed in a situation of marginalization (cf. Schweitzer, 2021; Schreiner, 2020). This goes along with a controversial discussion concerning RE's purpose and place in school and in school education (cf. Schreiner 2018a; Schweitzer 2018). While some countries have decided not to teach religion in public schools (cf. France or Slovak Republic), others follow different approaches ranging from confessional approaches with involvement of religious communities to religious studies approaches exclusively organized by the state (cf. Jackson et al., 2007; Schreiner, 2018b). Indicators of a marginalization are the place of RE in the curriculum, a lack of qualified teachers in many contexts (cf. for England: Commission, 2018), uncertainty about the aims of RE and the general dynamics of education, dominated by trends of economization and functionalization of RE which also affect and influence RE. It is remarkable that the trend of marginalization does not correlate with a specific

[2] This perspective is supported by different contributions in G. Biesta and P. Hannam (eds.) (2021).

existing approach but can be observed in different contexts (such as Sweden, England and Germany, cf. Schreiner, 2020).

A *second perspective* is related to developments which question international cooperation as well as long established political cooperation in general. Some of the international relationships and institutions have come under pressure not least due to a revival of the "national" and increasing tensions on a European and international level. Extremism and right-wing populism are two of the related phenomena which also matter for shaping context and content of education. A double challenge exists: (re-)nationalizing trends confront transnational cooperation in education policy (Brøgger et al., 2022). Additionally, the dynamic of the global COVID-19 pandemic profoundly changed the situation of international cooperation and exchange. Since 2020 face-to-face meetings could not take place for a long time, and conferences and exchanges via ZOOM or other video tools bring along a limited potential of encounter. The impact of COVID-19 on teaching and schooling in general and its effects on cooperation are not yet evaluated properly.[3]

A *third aspect* refers to the content and aims of RE. Where are common content-related challenges for RE irrespective of its context shaped approaches? Here we refer more on the extrinsic expectations of RE's contribution to societal problems nationally and internationally. No doubt that for a long-time education for peace and democracy and democratic citizenship belong to the expectation of a profound contribution of RE, coming now under pressure after the brutal war that Russia started in February 2022 against the Ukraine. This war is labelled by many politicians as a historical turning point for a peaceful living together and cooperation in Europe and worldwide. Although this horrifying situation has its roots in disrespecting international law, violating principles of human rights, disregarding the integrity of national territories, the urgent need of dialogue and cooperation should not be relativized as well as

[3] A comparative study about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education is published by UNESCO and IAE (2022) edited by Karin Meinck, Julian Fraillon and Rolf Strietholt that brings together findings from selected countries in different continents.

initiatives of peace education including the message of many religions of peace and reconciliation should be communicated and supported.

Other national and global challenges exist and influence the question of possible content of education and RE: The issues of climate change (cf. Leganger-Krogstad, 2021; Schluß, 2021) and the dynamic development of digitalisation (cf. EKD, 2022) are two current fields that need more attention in education and in RE. In addition, the increasing transnational situation of life worlds and their consequences for education and schooling must be considered (cf. Heidrich et al., 2021). All these items include challenges and potential of further development when it comes to PK in RE and to IKT. Concerning the understanding that "knowledge is 'powerful' because it frees those who have access to it and enables them to envisage alternative and new possibilities" (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 245), questions can be raised what exactly "powerful" means in this current situation, and what type of knowledge is "powerful" (cf. Alderson, 2020; Gericke et al., 2018; Nordgren, 2017, 2021).[4] Is it the "power" of destructive forces that damage dialogue and cooperation, or is there another type of "powerful" that can resist and contradict those forces of devastation that acts against any human dignity, and right? The meaning of "powerful" must be more specific in this context.

A *final point* should take account of the increasing global governance in education and of the lack of recognition of RE in studies and statements from international organisations. Here again the activities of international networks and associations in religious education should play a stronger role in future following a twin-track approach: by promoting common initiatives to strengthen religious education as an academic discipline (cf. Miedema, 2020, 2021a, b) and by re-confirming RE as an important school subject that contributes substantially to aims of general education based on mutual transfer and sharing of valid knowledge (cf. Böhme et al., 2021; Francis et al., 2021).

[4] Interestingly, the book edited by Mark Chater with the title *Reforming RE. Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* (2020) that brings together contributions referring to the proposed new curriculum in England "Religion and Worldviews" (cf. Commission 2018), does not refer to "powerful knowledge" explicitly but speaks of a "knowledge-rich" curriculum.

The Project on International Knowledge Transfer in Religious Education

Starting Point

A joint initiative of the Comenius Institute in Münster and the Department of Religious Education, University of Tübingen, brought together scholars from seven countries for two consultations on issues of IKT in RE in Berlin in 2018 and 2019 (cf. Schweitzer, 2019). During these consultations, the plan for drafting and publishing a manifesto on international knowledge transfer in religious education was developed. The manifesto is a first outcome of the project. It outlines the challenge that compared to other fields of knowledge such as the natural sciences or medical research, the field of religious education has not reached the point at which one could speak of an integrated international field of research. A leading question is, "Can religious education be viewed, at least in part, as a research discipline producing results which are of international importance for both, theoretical and empirical insights and also in terms of their applicability in practices in religious education?" (Manifesto in Schweitzer & Schreiner 2021, pp. 267–271, quote p. 268). It is mentioned that although in many countries a strong tendency exists towards developing religious education as a field of research of its own right (cf. Schweitzer & Boschki, 2018), it certainly is not the rule that research results on religious education are considered of interest beyond the given country. This could also be related to the discussion of PK in RE. Is this a national bounded discourse or are scholars in different countries involved, and what does that mean for developing this concept further? A second outcome of the project is a publication that brings together contributions of the second consultation describing processes of IKT in the practice of RE and in RE teacher education as well as research projects of IKT in academic religious education (Schweitzer & Schreiner, 2021).

Questions and Clarifications

It was clear from the beginning of the project that the manifesto and the chapters of the mentioned book should not be received as final products but as creative contributions and as an invitation for further discussion and discourse to identify common ground as well as controversial issues of IKT. The manifesto has been distributed and published in several leading journals in different countries and a special issue of the journal *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie* was dedicated to the ongoing discussion (ZPT, 2021).

Throughout the manifesto and the chapters of the book, a need for clarification and agreement is expressed along the following questions:

- What exactly is meant by "knowledge" in religious education, and what kinds of knowledge are transferred?
- What "transfer" means, and what makes such transfer possible?
- Is there knowledge in religious education that can be applied internationally and by whom?
- How can the national and the international context be productively connected with each other?
- Which concept or understanding of "international" should be used when it comes to transfer of knowledge? (cf. Schweitzer, & Schreiner, 2021, p. 269).

The process aims not to figure out ready-made answers to these questions but to initiate an ongoing dialogue and exchange among scholars about the questions.

Where Is the Project Now?

The editors of the book have drawn some conclusions, open questions, and concerns from the chapters with a focus on the three main terms of the project, "international", "knowledge", and "transfer".

The following conditions and questions were identified concerning "international":

- The lasting influence of the nation state in education.
- The need for balance between different audiences and contexts of cooperation. "The closer religious education wants to be to the various forms of educational practice, the more it needs to be aware of national or even regional and local audiences. The more religious education wants to follow the lead of other academic disciplines and to enjoy the benefits of worldwide cooperation, the more it needs to address international audiences." (Schreiner & Schweitzer, 2021b, p. 260)
- How can an adequate balance between publications in English and publications in other languages be achieved?
- Is internationalization a promising future for religious education as an academic discipline?
- How much effort should be invested in transforming religious education into a fully international endeavour?

Concerning the understanding of the term "knowledge", the complexity of the body of knowledge which is constitutive of religious education was underlined.

Among the range of questions, the following two seem of special importance:

- What further research is needed to collect, delineate and integrate the knowledge which exists in religious education? What role, for example, should the analysis of journals and textbooks play in this context? What other sources should be taken into consideration?
- Can there be a cumulative progression in the knowledge production of religious education?

In the introductory chapter of the book, a systematic overview on types of knowledge in religious education is presented as far as it is related to the school subject of RE. This includes:

- *Philosophy of science/of the discipline* with foundational questions about the nature of the discipline.
- *General knowledge concerning religion* (subject matter, imported from other disciplines) that includes theology, religious studies, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, cultural studies, philosophy of education/educational research, political science, and so on.
- *Knowledge concerning research methods, methodologies and approaches.*
- *Knowledge generated by academic religious education* (historical, theoretical, empirical, comparative, evaluative) that includes the history of the school subject and of the academic discipline; theories concerning the aims, processes, and outcomes of RE; quantitative and qualitative results of respective studies, for example, on international, interdenominational and interreligious character of RE as well as RE in relation to "competing" or alternative subjects (ethics, citizenship education, etc.).
- *Knowledge generated in practice* with a focus on teachers as researchers
- *Knowledge concerning the training of religious educators* including models of teacher education, theories of teaching/learning/development and curricula for teacher education.
- *Professional knowledge of teachers* of RE concerning the subject area, subject-related didactics, orientative knowledge concerning RE, knowledge of pedagogy and psychology as well as knowledge concerning professional identity, roles and responsibilities.
- *Knowledge to be acquired by the pupils/students* as documented in the curriculum and description of competences. (cf. Schweitzer & Schreiner, 2021, p. 26)

Considering these different types of knowledge, identified for religious education, it can be observed that the list includes both references to rather general questions like teaching and learning and topics which are closely related to national or even regional rulings and presuppositions. It demonstrates also that knowledge to be acquired by students that can be labelled "powerful knowledge" is just one area where knowledge matters for RE in the project on IKT. As it will be argued later in this chapter, connections and relations to PK can be identified and discussed.

The types of knowledge preferable for transfer were identified as follows:

- *transferable knowledge* produced not by "methodological nationalism" (Ulrich Beck) but taking account of the radical metamorphosis towards a more cosmopolitan society and related research to that development.
- *valid knowledge* produced by academic research organized beyond national boundaries.
- *common cumulative knowledge* not as a problem-solver but for analysing (common) problems. (cf. Schreiner & Schweitzer, 2021a, p. 26)

Knowledge Transfer

The focus in the text of the manifesto concerning "transfer" is "to share knowledge rather than just trying to transfer it in the sense of handing on packages of fixed knowledge" (Schreiner & Schweitzer, 2021b, p. 263). This understanding of sharing must include the joint production of knowledge in research projects which are not limited to researchers in one country. And again this seems to be a common challenge for PK in RE and for IKT.

A current example from which one can learn is the READY project (Religious Education and Diversity, cf. Schreiner, 2018b, 2021) in which encounters and exchange of teacher students and teacher educators in religious education from different European countries provided a space for dealing with the increasing diversity in the RE classroom from the perspective of varied RE approaches in the participating countries. Although READY was not designed as a research project, the issue of knowledge transfer through national and multi-national meetings came up constantly and a contested issue was about the kind of knowledge about religions and worldviews may be a candidate to form a theoretical and practical basis for RE. It can be stated that a kind of overlapping consensus about these issues could be reached between the different approaches to RE. As one expert stressed, the "European lens" has become an image for "enabling us to recognize the dominant characteristics of our own Religious Educations" (Pearce, 2018, p. 86). The guiding vision

of such programmes seems to create elements of an integrated (European) space of knowledge and research, based on academic cooperation throughout the Union and beyond.

Also, the idea of improved international partnerships in religious education research is mentioned. "Such partnerships make sense concerning knowledge gained in academic research as well as concerning the experiential knowledge to be found with practitioners in the field." (Schreiner & Schweitzer, 2021b, p. 263)

In addition to international-comparative research, recent research in the history of (religious) education has focused on transnational phenomena including the bilateral or multilateral exchange of ideas, at the level of individuals or groups (cf. Möller & Wischmeyer, 2013; Käbisch & Wischmeyer, 2018). Unlike international approaches, the transnational perspective is not intended to limit itself to the level of one or several nations which has led to the (re-)discovery of many exchanges and connections at various levels of exchange and cooperation between individuals or groups. The importance of both international and transnational perspectives for religious education has been successfully demonstrated.

In sum, internationalization has come to play a major role in the discipline of religious education which is why the question of international knowledge transfer deserves more attention. If international cooperation should mean more than getting together and giving each other new inspirations (which, most likely, will remain an important aspect of internationalization) and if cooperation in research and theory-building should be the more far-reaching aim, a few additional questions must be addressed. One of these questions refers to the question of validity upon which the possibility of international cooperation and knowledge transfer can be seen to hinge.

Some Aspects on Powerful Knowledge and RE

A first observation is that the concept of "Powerful Knowledge" (PK) is rarely related to Religious Education and no surprise therefore not mentioned in the project of IKT in RE, at least not explicitly. One reason for

that could be the emphasis on natural sciences and less on Humanities to which the study of religion belongs. PK is related to maths, science, history, geography and English but not to other subjects like RE. This has to do with the different "knowledge structure" as Johan Muller and Michael Young stress: "they (Humanities) were not in the first instance marked out by hierarchical structures of concepts in the same way as were the sciences" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 3). Nevertheless, some common concerns and perspectives can be identified. The first point is that both projects IKT and PK in RE engage with a concept of knowledge qualified by certainty, reliability, objectivity and even truth. And the request of high-quality teaching can be easily related to the discussion on which knowledge should be "used" for RE. The conviction that value and relevance of academic knowledge stem "from the disciplines" is appreciated in both projects. Two questions should be handled in the following paragraph: What exactly is Powerful Knowledge, and is it transferable? And, What makes knowledge powerful?

Michael Young, the main promoter of PK, differentiates knowledge from opinions and experience, states that not all knowledge is the same and that to produce new specialized knowledge requires specialist institutions like universities and research institutes (cf. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 230f.). PK is systematic and specialized. It highlights the importance of the disciplinary knowledge in educational science in general and in subject didactics in particular. PK refers to the aspects of knowledge towards which teaching should be oriented (cf. Gericke et al., 2018, p. 428). It means the knowledge pursued and taught by specialized disciplinary groups. In a recent article, Muller and Young (2019) summarize different "senses" of "powerful" as an essence of the debate so far, receptive of contributions from academic colleagues:

- *Power and academic disciplines*. "Disciplinary power is referred in two ways. First, the justification for disciplines as a community of self-governing peers is made on the basis that they produce specialized discourses that regulate and ensure reliability, revisability, and emergence. (…) Disciplinary meaning is meaning that is generative, in that it establishes an indirect relation of meaning between the concept and an aspect of the world." (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 14)

- *Power and the school curriculum*. Here the "undeniable" epistemic relation between the substantive domain of a subject and the subject itself is mentioned. Also the need of sequenced content and topic progression is highlighted as characteristics of teaching a subject.
- *Power as a generative capacity: the capacity to generate new ideas*. When teachers are successful mediators of the transformative capacity of PK in their subject, "the pupils become empowered in a range of ways: in the quality of their discernment and judgement; in their appreciation of the range and reach of the substantive and conceptual fields of the subject; and in their appreciation that the substantive detail they have learnt is only part of what the hinterland of the subject has to offer." (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 15)

At this point, it seems helpful to discuss the position of "knowledge" in learning and teaching. A critique on PK states that knowledge is not an end in itself, but a means to a larger purpose of education (cf. White, 2019, p. 433; White, 2018). And Priscilla Alderson states, "Knowledge alone is powerless. Its authority is ascribed, not intrinsic." (Alderson, 2020, p. 101). So the question is not what should students know, but "about how we can help our children and students to engage with, and thus come into, the world" (Biesta, 2013, p. 5).

It is a marker of RE that it is mainly based on a comprehensive understanding of education, where knowledge plays a crucial role but also other elements of competence such as attitudes, skills and volition. Practical know-how, personal development and learning to become a citizen of a democratic society needs more than powerful knowledge, although it does not contradict these aims (hopefully). Religious orientation or religious literacy means more than just receiving knowledge, and even general education should not be reduced on the pursuit of theoretical knowledge as a priority. Gert Biesta and Patricia Hannam (2021) states concerning knowledge in RE: "religious education is not only about what we want children and young people to know, but also about what we hope they will be able to do with what they know" (ibid., p. 148). This position takes the "subject-ness" of the student seriously and mentions the dimension of "subjectivication" as a central perspective and ambition for education beside qualification and socialization (cf. Biesta, 2021).

This includes looking beyond religion as an object of study and taking the existential dimension of religion seriously.[5] In the German context, general aims of RE include the provision of "religious orientation" that supports identity formation and the ability for plurality. This perspective cannot be reduced to the transmission of subject-specific knowledge (cf. Kirchenamt, 2014).

Jim Hordern (2021) sees PK as an inadequate basis for social justice and emphasize also that knowledge is never "for its own sake" but always in pursuit of something "at stake" (Hordern, 2021, p. 1). He is in line with increasing critique from sociologists, curriculum theorists and philosophers of education that the approach is "epistemologically unsound" and "misunderstands the nature and value of experience" (Hordern, 2021, p. 2).

In his paper, he argues "that PK can be usefully reconsidered in the light of the idea of normative practice (…) This provides for a fuller understanding of processes and accountabilities which are not discussed in the PK thesis, and a more incisive grasp on the relation between knowledge, knowing and experience" (Hordern, 2017, p. 3).

John White (2019) hesitates if "powerful" is the right term to characterize knowledge taught in school subjects, not least because of its popularity among politicians who use the term for their own purposes. He discusses the different "senses" used by Young who relates PK to academic disciplines, school subjects and also the "power as a generative capacity" that means a power to generate new ideas. White proposes the use of "specialized knowledge" because the definition of "power" and "powerful" is not clear and too vague for him. A motif for his position is also the fact that PK has tended to be associated only with a small range of subjects like maths, science and history/geography. Other subjects such as music or religious education are not even mentioned.

An element that can create a link between PK and IKT is the character of specialized knowledge according to Young. He states, "specialized knowledge is produced by social conditions and contexts but cannot be reduced to them. (…) However, the value of the knowledge is *independent* (italics in the original) of these originary contexts and their agents.

[5] This is elaborated in Biesta and Hannam (2021).

If it is not, if knowledge remains 'contextual', then specialization and therefore the reliability and (and in the sense we have used the term up to now) the 'power' of the knowledge will in a determinable sense remain limited" (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 237). It is here that a distinction between human and social sciences and natural sciences is made in the sense that the first-mentioned sciences are more "contextual" than the natural sciences. Exactly this tension between the relation of the contextual and generative knowledge that is valid beyond a specific context is also a crucial issue in the discourse of IKT.

A step forward in this discussion is the use of Bernstein's concept of a hierarchical knowledge structure (cf. Hordern, 2017). The basis is that different knowledge structures and their underlying theory differ in terms of their degree of verticality. Bernstein distinguishes between two distinct knowledge structures named vertical (that is specialized and systemically principled) and horizontal (that is "local, context-dependent", "everyday" and "common sense", cf. Hordern, 2017, p. 192). These forms are not reducible to one another. Vertical means specialized and horizontal refers to internal relations—theories and relations between sets of concepts—accrue not by one subsuming the other, but by the addition of parallel theories.

Young took the idea of verticality as a descriptor of knowledge for the curriculum.

So far, a possible relation between Religious Education and Powerful knowledge has not been discussed properly. An exemption is Richard Kueh's contribution as a manifesto for the future of RE (Kueh, 2018). He explores various attempts to promote educational clarity and security "in a given uncertain situation of RE" (in England). Kueh reflects on elements of marginalization and vulnerability and brings together arguments how to improve the situation. "If there is any hope of finding a workable model for RE, then practitioners and theoreticians must recognize the urgent need to gain momentum behind an agreed understanding of the knowledge it confers" (Kueh, 2018, p. 53). His chapter explore concepts of "deep" and "powerful" knowledge. We focus here on his arguments concerning "powerful" knowledge. Kueh's hope is that this concept can support the initiative to clarify "the intrinsic knowledge-basis for RE" (57) and to shape a "knowledge-based curriculum" (ibid.).

Richard Kueh relates the PK discussion to RE by dealing explicitly with the "knowledge problem" of RE. For him to find "a workable model for RE", the need is "to gain momentum behind an agreed understanding of the knowledge that it (RE) confers" (Kueh, 2018, p. 53). Consequently, he prefers "a knowledge-based curriculum that focuses upon the intrinsic value of that knowledge" (ibid., p. 56).

Other motifs of curricular expression that he is not in favour are the demands of the economy (an instrumental curriculum) or the individual's well-being and personal flourishing (an enrichment curriculum). The preferred knowledge-based curriculum is related to Michael Young's idea that "there is a core body of knowledge that students should know and that is supremely central to the identity and purposes of schools" (Kueh, 2018, p. 62). Michael Young's concept is helpful for RE, according to Kueh, because "it gives academic legitimacy to a subject discipline that navigates beliefs, practices, truth claims, self-understandings, cultures, traditions and narratives" (Kueh, 2018, p. 63). Kueh elaborates five principles as implicitly valuable for RE:

1. PK in RE brings *substantive knowledge* into the realm of *disciplinary knowledge* through concepts.
2. PK in RE is rooted in the way "the world is." It has the capacity to change or transform and is defined "by the global and historical patterns of religion and belief". (Kueh, 2018, p. 65)
3. PK in RE "confronts the questions of truth, evidence and proof and how these, in turn, come to bear on meaning". (p. 65)
4. PK in RE requires critical engagement with the concepts of identity and culture as they relate to human meaning.
5. PK recognizes that learners are citizens on an inherently diverse world. (cf. Kueh, 2018, p. 65f.)

In sum, he mentions: "For Religious Education, powerful knowledge constitutes the concepts that unlock a greater understanding of the world; of the religions of the people who inhabit it; of human cultures and societies; of beliefs and values; of language and text; and of interpretation and thought" (Kueh, 2018, p. 67).

Although Kueh's analysis includes an either/or perspective on the mentioned motifs of an RE curriculum, qualification (not only as demands from economy) and individual's well-being are also legitimate educational perspectives where RE should contribute to (cf. Biesta, 2021) his view is partly convincing that solid knowledge should be central to RE. Surprisingly his concluding points are not necessarily linked to any content named "powerful", and it is still not clear why PK can bring such a change for the question on content in RE.

A preliminary conclusion at this point is that the relation between PK and RE should be further discussed and developed.

Common Concerns and Challenges

The presentation of both the project on International Knowledge Transfer in RE and the discourse on Powerful Knowledge in RE lay ground to finally introduce common concerns, and also challenges that need further reflection and development. The following points should not be seen as a final list but as food for thought for further exchange and dialogue.

- The first point is that in both projects the question of the validity of knowledge in religious education is taken up and discussed. For IKT this is mentioned as a presupposition of international transfer and cooperation and reflects the fact that more and more empirical research activities take place on basics and issues of RE in a comparative and cumulative organized way internationally (cf. Schweitzer & Boschki, 2018; Schweitzer et al., 2019). Special attention is given to the relationship between universal and contextual elements or dimensions of knowledge in religious education and their epistemological implications. This development is supported by the fact that in many contexts religious education has been established as an academic discipline of its own, working with an interdisciplinary perspective. The question, "How can the national and the international context be productively connected to each other?" is a continuing challenge for activities of knowledge transfer. It also raises the question if a concept such as "Powerful Knowledge" that derives in a specific context is transferable

and useful beyond this specific context. For Muller and Young, there is no doubt about that, because "potentially, everyone can have this power (of knowledge), it is infinitely transferable" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 3). It could be developed further by initiatives of fleshing out curricula by international cooperation (cf. Schweitzer, 2021, p. 156f.).

- A second point is the value of "knowledge" as such for education. In both concepts, knowledge is not seen as an end in itself but is linked to the debate about the general purpose of education and of religious education. A critique of PK is that other dimensions of education are not equally valued by the concept of PK. We should not be satisfied with knowledge alone when it comes to education. As Alderson expressed, "All students need education that combines social usefulness with personal relevance, with access to the knowledge, values and skills that will help them through their personal and working lives" (Alderson, 2019, p. 104). The concept of "competence", especially promoted internationally through PISA, refers to the cognitive abilities and skills available to or learnable by individuals in order to solve specific problems, as well as the motivational, volitional and social readiness so that the problem solutions can be used successfully and responsibly in variable situations. So the shift is from what should student know to what should students be able to do.
- Often knowledge is overestimated as an aim of education, and the intention, purpose and use of knowledge is not clear. Other views in education philosophy that overcome an exclusive focus on knowledge should be included. Tobin Hart (2007) has developed a map of the depths of knowing and learning on the journey "from information to transformation" (as the title of his book suggests) that can enhance the debate. He proposes a process moving through six interrelated layers. "As the surface layer, *information* is given the rightful place as currency for the educational exchange. Information can then open up into *knowledge*, where direct experience often brings together the bits of information into the whole of mastery and skill. Knowledge opens the possibility of intentionally cultivating *intelligence*, which can cut, shape, and create information and knowledge through the dialectic of the intuitive and analytic. Further down lies *understanding*, which takes us beyond the power of intelligence to look through the eye of

the heart, a way of knowing that serves character and community. Experience then has the possibility for cultivating *wisdom*, which blends insight into what is true with and ethic of what is right. Ultimately, the depths lead to the possibility of *transformation*." (Hart, 2007, p. 2)

- School subjects and the academic disciplines have different aims. Transfer and sharing are needed that respects the different systems and dynamics. The role of school subjects is not to produce new knowledge, which could be said to be the main purpose of the academic disciplines. Content knowledge needs to be adapted into educational processes that are connected to the life world of the students as well as to the teachers understanding and perspective. "Knowledge" is used differently in IKT and in PK. While IKT has its focus on the transfer of valid knowledge that is based on research based on a broad list of different types of knowledge, all relevant for RE, PK's concern is about one segment of this list, the knowledge that lay ground for curricula development and teaching in the classroom. It has become obvious that those who discuss PK critically refer to the fact that school education and the aim of school subjects include more than transferring knowledge, incorporating educational goals relating to, for example, values (equality, democracy and so on) and skills (critical thinking, action competence). Gert Biesta suggests that education always needs to orient itself to three "domains of purpose", to which he refers as qualification, socialization and subjectification (cf. Biesta, 2021). Being aware of the need of a meaningful balance between all three, especially the third domain, is relevant for RE, that is to "encourage students to take up their subject-ness, that is, to become subjects of their own life, rather than objects of what other people or forces may want them to be" (Biesta & Hannam, 2021, p. 3). It could mean that in the domain of qualification, RE "has an important role to play in providing pupils and students with knowledge and understanding about religion, religions and the religious, and with the skills to use such knowledge and understanding wisely" (Biesta, 2021, pp. 12–13).

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5

Knowledge-based Teaching About Religious Diversity: A New Approach in the "Culture and Citizenship in Québec"

Sivane Hirsch

Quebec's "Ethics and Religious Culture" program (ERC) was designed to help secondary students gain a better understanding of the province's major religious traditions, without necessarily demanding a mastery of the foundations of each one. The program adopted a "cultural approach" to the topic, aiming to give students a broad survey of what it referred to as the "phenomenon of religion." This approach presented several challenges for teachers and their trainers (Hirsch, 2017), not the least of which was the task of mastering the complex curriculum. How could one expect high school teachers to be able to present such a wide range of religions, and take into consideration all of their different tendencies, or even simply look at the ways in which these traditions are practiced in Quebec?

What makes this more challenging is the fact that Quebec is a relatively secularized society (Rondeau, 2018), yet the majority of Quebecers are related more or less consciously to the Catholic tradition in ways

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which can be confusing for outsiders to understand. Many Quebecers, for example, consider their religious tradition to be "patrimonial" (Hervieu-Léger, 2004) and in any case, very few have the theoretical knowledge needed to compare "their" religion with others. The differences between Catholicism and other Christian traditions are seldom considered. For many Quebecers, ideas of religious diversity stay within very general lines. Christianity (mainly understood as Catholicism), Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are all presented as unitary and coherent doctrines.

This tendency to over-simplify complex faith traditions was most striking in the programme's approach to Indigenous spirituality. While the 11 different nations (10 First Nations and Inuit) living in Quebec may share some aspects of spiritual practice, the Ethics and Religious Culture program presented a generalized and "pan-Canadian" version of Indigenous spirituality that included features not part of any particular Indigenous faith tradition in Quebec. Thus, the program considered everything that is indigenous to be part of a coherent ensemble, thereby erasing the specific identity of each nation, and contributing to an essentialist image of Indigenous people.

The challenge of presenting complex religious diversity is compounded by the fact that many of the topics covered by the program are perceived to be sensitive (Hirsch & Moisan, 2022). Unless these themes can be properly contextualized in a social, political and scientific debate, there is a risk of provoking emotional debates amongst students about religion and social values that will lack a foundation of theoretical knowledge.

The choice to address the "phenomenon of religion" in this way seems to be imbedded in a political reality. On the one hand, Quebec's ethnocultural and religious diversity is unquestionable. On the other, a program that aims to "recognize the other" in the "pursuit of the common good" cannot easily make a choice between the various religious traditions to be presented in the curriculum without being accused of either ethnocentrism on the one hand, or absolute relativism on the other.

In January 2020, Quebec's Minister of Education announced the revision of the ERC program, which had faced severe criticism in recent years (Baril & Baillargeon, 2016), especially in regards to its religious culture component. The new program—called the "Culture and citizenship in

Quebec" (CCQ)—will be officially available in June 2023, and is set to be tested in certain schools as early as September 2022. The CCQ no longer gives as much room to teaching about Quebec's different religions, and instead, religion is treated as one theme among others, seen through the twin lenses of sociology and ethics, with specific attention paid to developing critical thinking and dialogue. However, the specific themes in the curriculum have not yet been officially presented.

In this chapter, I propose to examine how powerful knowledge—defined "not only an organization of knowledge, but an organization of resources" (Young, 2021, p. 241) —especially considering that religious diversity is one of those "disciplines where new knowledge is produced in the universities"(p.242), but it is also knowledge about which students have often knowledge from home. Even more so, while this is part of what makes religious diversity a sensitive topic, it is also a condition for successfully evoking this topic in a school setting. I will begin by explaining why religious diversity is a sensitive topic, and then examine the CCQ program as a case study, and demonstrate how it sheds light on some of the rather theoretical considerations of learning about religious diversity with powerful knowledge. Finally, I will end this chapter by looking at some specific examples of the pedagogical tools used to examine religious diversity in schools.

Making Room for Diversity

Taking ethnocultural and religious diversity into account was already a political and pedagogical concern in Quebec beginning in 1998, with the adoption of the Quebec Policy on School Integration and Intercultural Education. This policy, which was reaffirmed in 2014, emphasized the importance of civic education in a plural society, while at the same time making room for Quebec's heritage and a common French-language culture. The policy referred to the importance of adopting a curriculum that would prepare students for "living together," but also to the importance of helping teachers and school personnel to be more inclusive, and to recognize the diversity of students' needs.

Such an intercultural education perspective does not aim to simply ensure the integration of students from immigrant backgrounds, but also endeavours to give all students tools for living together in a plural society (Borri-Anadon et al., 2015). Thus, it makes room for diversity by addressing all students in the classroom, including the suggestion that staff adopt equity practices in consideration of students' diverse life experiences. This means more than learning the importance of accommodating and promoting diversity, and reaches further by trying to make room for introducing different perspectives. Ultimately, the approach dispenses with the idea of a single reality, or a single truth (LeVasseur et al., 2013). Far from taking up a standpoint of cultural relativism, which considers all values and worldviews to be equal, intercultural education means taking a critical distance from the ambient ethnocentrism that often characterizes school programs (Mc Andrew et al., 2011), and giving a certain amount of space to diverse ways of seeing the world.

The primary and secondary school curricula in Quebec have many points of support for intercultural education, both in their statements of general orientation and in their detailed descriptions of competencies and learning content (Mc Andrew, 2010; Mc Andrew & Audet, 2017; Potvin et al., 2006). From a pedagogical perspective, the basis of intercultural education lies in the mastery of three competencies that must be present in all programs: 1) exercising critical judgment, in which recognition of prejudices and putting one's opinions into perspective are emphasized; 2) structuring one's identity, whereby students are asked to recognize their roots in their own culture, and to welcome those of others; and finally, 3) cooperation, which is based on respect for differences, a sensitivity to the Other and a constructive openness to pluralism and non-violence.

The 1998 policy on School Integration and Intercultural Education outlined various programs that could contribute to learning about diversity, and included history and citizenship education programs. Immigrant communities, including some minority religious groups such as the Jewish community, were featured as well. However, our analysis of textbooks (Hirsch & Mc Andrew, 2014) and teaching practices in this regard has shown that the treatment of these communities was sporadic, and often limited to the time of their arrival, rather than showing their

historical development. As a result, the current contribution of immigrant communities to the cultural, religious or economic life of Quebec is not adequately understood or acknowledged.

Despite these and other issues, the Ethics and Religious Culture program nevertheless aimed specifically at a "recognition of the other" for "the pursuit of the common good." In so doing, the program created an important space for understanding the different cultures, worldviews and ways of living in Quebec society, both in terms of religious diversity and in terms of a broader diversity of values. The practice of dialogue, to which the program devoted a competency, was intended to let students express their point of view within the framework of this pluralism of ideas, beliefs and ways of life.

Over the years, the ERC has become the place where religious diversity is addressed in the school context. Nevertheless, there have been many criticisms of the program, with some scholars arguing that program tended to present the idea of religion in an uncritical and positive light, while others took issue with the folkloric and even essentialist manner in which religious traditions were presented (Hirsch & Jeffrey, 2020b).

The Principles of the CCQ Program

As I write these lines, the CCQ program has not yet been officially published, so what I present here are only the general lines of this program, which we may understand as its "principles." The purpose of this presentation is not to analyse the program itself, but rather to use it as an opportunity to reflect on ways of teaching religious diversity, based on a perspective that sees religion as simply one theme among others. The CCQ program suggests analysing these various themes related to Quebec's culture and citizenship through the viewpoints offered by sociology and ethics. Additionally, the program builds competencies in critical thinking and dialogue and thereby aims towards achieving three main learning goals: (1) the recognition of self and others; (2) the pursuit of the common good; and (3) preparing students to exercise citizenship. The interdisciplinary approach is particularly relevant to our perspective of knowledge-based teaching of diversity, since it offers two different ways

of approaching a student's reality by adopting two distinct forms of reasoning. While the ethical competency focuses on values and norms by analysing the principles that underlie them, the sociological competency proposes to observe the social context in which they take shape. Considered as a whole, the CCQ program takes advantage of the complementary nature of these two methods of analysis, particularly with regard to evaluating information, and when it comes to justifying points of view, as well as revising ideas in light of evidence and analysis.

Within both disciplinary perspectives, students are invited to develop their critical thinking by distancing themselves from both themselves and their experiences (Schwimmer, 2015). This critical distance is achieved by using criteria to analyse their observations, and "objectify" their thinking (Hirsch & Jeffrey, 2020a) thereby making it more complex and nuanced. In doing so, students can situate their thinking in their real world—rather than thinking in terms of purely theoretical dilemmas that remain disconnected from their reality. At the same time, students can also distance themselves from their initial and often emotional reactions, and develop a more critical regard for their own prejudices and preconceptions.

The dialogue component in each competency aims to teach students how to evolve ideas by discovering the arguments of others through writing, reading and discussion. Dialogue can take different forms, starting with a simple discussion that allows exposure to other ideas, or going through different modes of debate that facilitate questioning arguments, or finally, engaging in a process of deliberation, which is related to competencies of citizenship and citizen action (Hess & Mcavoy, 2015). Clearly, this facility for dialogue and deliberation not only underpins the learning of critical thinking, but it is of great importance when discussing sensitive themes.

The three learning outcomes of the CCQ program mentioned above are of particular importance when it comes to the issue of religious diversity. However, the larger challenge is to help students overcome the idea that what is good for you is necessarily good for others. Similarly, students must be encouraged not to confuse the notion of the common good with what a majority of citizens may desire at a given moment, and on a particular issue, thereby endangering the rights of minorities. This

challenge is so significant that it is prompting some researchers (Knowles & Clark, 2017) to wonder if the idea of common good is acceptable in the context of learning about diversity and different religious traditions. The risk, of course, is that an untethered debate can reproduce and enforce power relations that exist outside the classroom. This is particularly true when it comes to debates about religious diversity. In the next section, I will examine why the idea of religious diversity is considered to be a sensitive issue, and look at what is at stake in terms of educational practice.

Religious Diversity as a Sensitive Topic

There have been many situations in the last few years in Quebec and elsewhere that have shown how sensitive the topic religion can be in the public sphere. Only recently, questions of wearing a veil in a public place, or while working in the public service, have underlined how heated public responses can be. In our work, we consider "sensitive topics" (Hirsch & Moisan, forthcoming) to be more than simply "hot" issues that are debated in the public sphere. Instead, we are working to a definition that is intended to be operational, in that it seeks to provide a better understanding of what makes different topics emerge as sensitive in the classroom. Equipped with this knowledge, we can then act on these aspects, and mitigate the negative consequences of this perceived sensitivity. Our definition comprises four distinct dimensions, which nevertheless depend on one other. They are an ethical dimension, a social dimension, a political dimension and, finally, a pedagogical dimension.

The ethical dimension arises because discussion of these sensitive topics evokes personal values and social representations—both for teachers, for students and even for parents. This highlights the challenge of emotions in the classroom, for while they can "hook" students and make them engage, emotions can also exacerbate sensitivities, and even lead students away from uncomfortable critical reflection. In the case of religious diversity, this dimension is put to the test as soon as different beliefs are considered, and their role in guiding actions is addressed. For instance, why do Jewish orthodox men insist on the importance of opening

synagogues for community prayers while other faith groups respected COVID restrictions? In order to answer this, one must understand that Jewish belief can be translated into action in complex ways, often in accordance with subtle and specific doctrines. In the face of this difficulty, teachers may be confronted by their own values, which might include the idea that one should first respect the rules imposed by the ministry of health of the Province of Quebec. At the same time, instructors may lack an understanding of how complex doctrine can guide action, with the result that certain faith groups may appear irrational. I will return to this issue later, but for now, we can see that the importance of respecting the common good (one of the Quebec program's objectives) and the role of a teacher as a "cultural transmitter" called on to "present" certain "Quebec values" to all students can produce difficult contradictions and conflicts.

The social dimension contained in our definition of what constitutes a "hot" issue points to the plural character of Quebec society, as with other contemporary societies. This diversity is of multiple origins: religious, but also ethnocultural, linguistic, sexual, ideological, political and so on. These markers of identities are sometimes self-proclaimed, and other times they are assigned (Juteau, 2018). They allow members of society to situate themselves as distinct from, but in relation to, a complex plurality of others. Indeed, in Quebec and in Canada, charters and the constitution guarantee the rights of all in this plural context. This diversity extends well beyond what is easy to "see" on the surface. For example, there are complex diversities within religious communities, which must not be thought of as monolithic, and whose members often welcome different practices and worldviews. Because this diversity is less visible to those on the outside, there is a risk that students belonging to the faith traditions being taught in the classroom may not recognize themselves in the educational material being presented. For example, not all Muslim girls wear the veil, but those who do can wear it quite differently—with different colours, different ways of attaching it, different ways of dressing or wearing makeup, all while wearing the veil. Teachers need to have the knowledge to explain this diversity, but often, this knowledge is lacking. I will return to this issue in the pedagogical dimension of our definition.

The political dimension constituting religion as a sensitive topic refers to the different ways of living together that are addressed by sensitive topics such as those that concern religious diversity and the "power relationships" (rapports de pouvoir) that define them. These themes are all the more sensitive in the context of the CCQ program, which, like its predecessor, the ERC program, aims at the pursuit of the common good, and therefore presupposes the possibility of deliberating to reach a common agreement within this framework. Such negotiation is by its very nature political. It becomes particularly sensitive when dealing with religious diversity which, as we have just shown, does not necessarily have a legitimate place in public sphere in Quebec. Obviously, the political dimension takes on a greater importance when an issue is debated in the political sphere, and when partisan politics are involved. This was often the case in regard to religious diversity in Quebec, particularly in the debates surrounding and addressing secularism as a primary civic value (Dalpé & Koussens, 2016). These debates highlighted the plurality of approaches within Quebec society, but also pointed to an increasingly polarized social and political climate. In the contexts of these debates, different worldviews were pitted against each other, and it was difficult—if not impossible—to find a balance between individual rights and what could be considered as the common good.

The final and more strictly pedagogical dimension of our definition is in many ways a consequence of the first three. The first aspect to consider is the complexity of these sensitive topics, which generally require a wide knowledge and an in-depth treatment, often in interdisciplinarity, in the classroom. For example, in order to better understand issues surrounding the wearing of religious symbols, one must first try to understand the belief that requires wearing a religious symbol, in addition to other religious practices, and the meaning of these practices for the believer. One should also try to consider the multiple ways in which a person can interpret religious doctrine and the practices associated with it. It can also be necessary to understand the values that underlie, in a society of law, the protection of individual rights and the limits of this protection. We can also analyse social reactions to the wearing of religious symbols by referring to a particular political and social history, in Quebec and elsewhere, as well as setting out current political issues surrounding these practices.

This complexity demands specific pedagogical approaches. It may be preferable, for instance, to avoid a dichotomous vision of a particular social issue by imposing a debate in the classroom. While this pedagogical approach is supposed to encourage critical thinking, it also runs the risk of introducing social polarization and an uncritical emotional involvement.

Teaching About Religious Diversity in Different Contexts

One of the challenges of treating any sensitive topic in the classroom, and with teaching religious diversity in particular, lies in how best to adopt teaching contexts that take into account the plurality of Quebec's society. The growing presence of immigration outside the metropole of Montreal is contributing greatly to the linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of the province. As significant as this may be, there is an underlying historical diversity too, one that is composed of francophones, anglophones and Indigenous people, as well as of past waves of immigrants living in different regions of the province. As a result, Quebec schools, like the society in which they are located, are increasingly characterized by ethnic, cultural and religious diversity.

Just over 25% of students in Quebec are of immigrant background (first and second generations combined) (ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2013). Admittedly, some regions are less directly affected by recent immigration. Others have a large number of students, or even almost all students from recent immigrant backgrounds (Borri-Anadon & Hirsch, 2021). And in more homogeneous settings, some schools or classrooms may still have as many as 50% of students coming from immigrant communities (Hirsch & Borri-anadon, forthcoming). Moreover, this immigration is increasingly diverse from a linguistic, religious, cultural or ethnic point of view, leading to an encounter between systems of meaning that are increasingly distant from the majority language, religion and culture in Quebec (Mc Andrew, 2010).

As we have shown in our project "Keys for a Better Understanding of the Ethnocultural, Religious, and Linguistic Diversity in Schools,"[1] ethnocultural and religious diversity is present in all of Quebec's regions, although it manifests differently in different parts of the province. By presenting a typology that expands the idea of a simple divide between Montreal and the other regions, we may inspire schools to use teaching practices that respond to their particular realities and experiences and support the academic progress of diverse students (Hirsch & Borri-Anadon, forthcoming). The challenge for teachers is twofold. To begin with, teachers want to embrace the diversity that surrounds them, but they may not fully understand the particular kind of diversity that exists in their school. In Montreal, for example, religious diversity is linked to the many waves of immigration to the metropole over the years. In more remote areas, however, diversity is linked to the presence of the First Peoples, as well to the legacies of more historical waves of migration. Meanwhile, teachers may feel compelled to talk about Quebec society as a whole, rather than focus solely on a particular region or context. In other words, to fully understand the current Quebec context, it is important to talk about diversity in all its forms and in all its regions.

This is a challenge in both plural and homogeneous contexts. In areas with obvious and visible diversity, the challenge seems obvious: when teachers are confronted with a diversity of religions they may not know enough about, they can be understandably reluctant to engage with this diversity in class, especially considering the amount of time they have to master the demands of the curriculum. In a more homogenous context, teachers might mistakenly believe that religious diversity is absent from the classroom, and therefore neglect to address it. In both cases, the fact that students may appear to represent a certain religious diversity in a classroom does not mean that he or she identifies with it. Teachers must be very sensitive to balance between identifying a student in class by a religious affiliation.

[1] This is an English translation of the project's original French title "Des clés pour miex comprendre la diversite ethnoculturelle, religieuse et linguistique en milieu scolaire." This project was made possible through the support of the Direction de l'intégration linguistique et de l'éducation interculturelle of the ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. The project is available in French through the Laboratoire éducation et diversité en région at www.uqtr.ca/ledir/fichesregionales.

In our research on the teaching of sensitive topics (Hirsch & Moisan, 2022), the theme of religious diversity comes up regularly, first in connection with the question of context, and then when it comes to the question of the knowledge needed to address diversity as a sensitive topic.

Here are some examples.

One teacher said that he was talking about the issue of the veil in class, and that one of his students wore a veil. During the discussion, another student said:

> "Well criss, he could hide a bomb in there". And that for me is unacceptable, so I expelled the students and I called the parents. [...] And when I kick them out, it's to show that the limit has been crossed. I think I've done that once to date. I also warned the parents. [...] The mother was not happy... the youngster apologized too. He did it to make people laugh and he didn't realize that he could hurt people's feelings. (E3H)

In this account, the teacher finds the situation difficult to handle. He talks about the students being overly emotional, and as prone to unreflective reaction. Other difficult factors include the overly politicized speech of the student in question, and the lack of respect shown to the Muslim student. Finally, the teacher speaks about his lack of knowledge to recover the discussion "objectively."

Another example is offered by a teacher who works in a school in an area that is far from major centres and more homogeneous. He explains that in his classroom, he feels like he has to "represent" Quebec's religious diversity to his students, and their arguments regarding societal debates about religions:

> If there was a student or two who was against the law, well...she could be against the law, but she's a white girl, she's still part of the most popular ethnic group in the school. She couldn't counterargue from her personal life. (E2H)

Thus, diversity is noticeable in its presence as well as in its absence from the classroom: as an integral part of Quebec society, teachers clearly understand that they can no longer ignore it in their practices, while at

the same time they may not have the tools to teach issues of diversity adequately.

Teachers also speak about the challenge of answering students' questions about cults. They question the terms used, the definitions of religion and even the number of legitimate religions and how can they tell apart the "real" religions from the "false" ones. One teacher explains that she finds these questions difficult because she is worried about how to answer these and other questions without imposing a Judeo-Christian view on "other" religions. The explicit requirement from ERC teachers—that may extend to the CCQ program—is to be impartial and objective about all topics with regard to the subject material, including expressions of religion. As one can imagine, this is a difficult posture to maintain. Teachers must find a way to negotiate between ethnocentrism, on the one hand, and relativism on the other, and avoid any easy comparison between "us" and "them." However, both "us" and "them" are social constructions for students in the classroom, stemming from misrepresentations of Quebec society and which make little or no room for its real diversity. Moreover, this posture of balance is often misinterpreted as a requirement for neutrality, which is, in fact, untenable for any teacher who belongs to a minority, be it ethnocultural, or religious. The result of a "neutral" posture may be that the teacher sends the paradoxical message that diversity has no place in the school, whereas the program the teacher is working with aims precisely at the recognition of this diversity.

Another teacher recounts discussions on these topics with colleagues who may have completely different interpretations:

> For example, the new religious movements. My colleague said, "No, no. You can't bring that up. You can't bring that up, that's cults." I'm like, "No, no. That's the new religious movements. It's not cults." "Yes, there are some in there that are cults." Just because of the discussions with her, I was like, "Okay, I'm going to talk about those groups." (EC4)

Teachers' feelings of discomfort have an impact on the disciplines they may use in order to present the themes of the ERC program. These can include history, sociology or political science. Despite this, all of the teachers spoke of their fear of debate on this subject, which they feel they

know little about, especially considering the wide range of possible themes and questions that teaching about diversity can raise. In the face of this lack of knowledge, teachers may adapt their teaching practices so that debate is minimized, to ensure that an instructor's authority is not contested by their students.

A Knowledge-based Proposal for Teaching About Diversity in a High School Classroom

Our research over the past ten years has allowed us to identify the challenges teachers face in teaching religious diversity. The most important challenge is the knowledge needed to master the subject. Additionally, the explicit expectation in the ERC program (which may be less explicit in the new CCQ program) is to present religions through a certain "hierarchy." The fact that the curriculum does not impose mandatory themes, but leaves it up to teachers to decide how they want to present diversity in their classrooms makes it an even greater challenge. As Young (2021) states, "any curriculum has both a conceptual basis (in academic subjects) and a resource basis (in the availability of the necessary human resources of well-qualified subject teachers and the appropriate material resources such as equipment and specialized accommodation). A powerful knowledge-based curriculum is also a high resource curriculum and often the necessary resources are not found in […] schools" (p. 242). This is the same finding that we have made in our various observations (Hirsch, 2018) of teaching about religious diversity in Quebec. Teachers have made it clear that they feel helpless in the face of the breadth of content they must master, and perplexed by the integration of this content into the curriculum that promotes—explicitly or implicitly—the majority experience.

This is why we have developed pedagogical support tools for history and ethics teachers to help them talk about religious diversity in Quebec (as well as other forms of diversity, especially visible diversity). The guides "Teaching the History of the Jewish Community in Quebec" (Hirsch & Moisan, 2018) and "Teaching the History of the Arab and Muslim

communities in Quebec" (Moisan & Hirsch, forthcoming) aim to present the history of these communities in a way that is adapted to the curriculum in order to meet teaching needs, while expanding the presentation to allow teachers to deepen their treatment of the history and culture of these communities in the classroom.

The guides are designed to support teachers to enable Quebec students to discover the plurality of viewpoints, memories and experiences of all the social groups that have contributed to building Quebec society. They provide teachers with tools and references to help them deal with the various "histories" of Quebec. These tools let teachers discuss different interpretations of Quebec's history, and help them, and their students, better understand the nature of the province's social pluralism.

Teaching the history of a community whose members have such different trajectories and cultures is not easy, and requires making choices and simplifications. In order to make their history tangible to students, we have chosen to present it in two themes: 1) the establishment of communities in Quebec; and 2) the contribution of communities and their members to Quebec society and to living together. By following the key elements of these two themes, the guides make it possible to account for various facets of diverse experiences, and understand the complexity of stories within Quebec's complex diversity. Given the stress on the notion of dialogue in the ERC (but also in the new CCQ course), these tools can contribute to a deliberative approach with students in discussions about religious diversity.

Let's consider a few examples. The founding of a Jewish hospital in Montreal in 1934 is an interesting one, because it is related to an antisemitic incident involving a young medical trainee who was not allowed to do his internship in any Quebec hospital. His fellow trainees went on strike rather than let him complete his internship; so he was forced to leave for New York. This incident prompted the Jewish community to raise the necessary funds to open their own hospital. The hospital's goal was (and is) to respect "the principles of the various religions, cultures and ethnic communities," while ensuring that it offers "an environment that respects the religious, spiritual and cultural values advocated by the Jewish religion." Few Quebecers know this historical context. The presence of a "Jewish" hospital that has clearly demonstrated its refusal, in recent years,

to respect the constraints imposed by new laws on the wearing of religious symbols has not gone unnoticed. The hospital seems to be against the current of Quebec society, and even in conflict with its fundamental values. However, through the presentation of the history of the hospital, students can better understand how it offered a much-needed response to discrimination against the Jewish community, especially in relation to medical care. This history also helps students understand the importance given by the hospital to the possibility of accepting everyone—employees and patients—regardless of their religious practices.

Another interesting example is the complex nature of communities often considered to be monolithic by Quebecers. This is particularly true in the case of Arab and Muslim communities. Indeed, very often, we speak of "Arab-Muslim" communities, whereas in fact, Muslims are not all Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslims. The presentation in the guide of the various waves of immigration and their religious and ethnic origins and their settlement in Quebec in the different regions make it possible to better situate this diversity.

Young explains that the concept of powerful knowledge is delimited by two different boundaries, the first "between subject-based knowledge of the curriculum and the everyday knowledge that all children acquire through the experience of growing up before they come to school and during their school years" (2021, p. 243) and second boundary that is located between subjects. The goal is therefore not necessarily to offer a basic religious literacy (Moore, 2012)—an idea that guided for the last years the implantation of the religious studies curriculum—but a historical literacy, or historical consciousness (Lee, 2011) that can shape a student's understanding of the world they live in. Indeed, as Young notes, "Whereas the former is located, at least in part in the community of historians and their debates and research and its findings, the latter is largely limited to a person's experience or that of the community or social class of which she/he is a member" (2021, p. 248). In other words, it is a question of going beyond the common knowledge of minority religious communities through presenting academically inflected knowledge that is both complex and dense, but which is nevertheless adapted to the schoolroom context. If they are successful, the guides can provide teachers and

their students with a better understanding of the challenges faced by religious minorities within a society where religion is increasingly excluded from public life.

Concluding Remarks

The reflections developed in this chapter demonstrate that approaching religious diversity as a school subject remains a pedagogical challenge—not only because it is a sensitive topic—but also because it requires using powerful knowledge to ensure the success of this kind of teaching. The objective is not necessarily to understand all religions or all of their internal differences, but to know that this diversity exists, and understand that religions are diverse within themselves. Such an understanding allows both teachers and students to avoid the trap of essentializing others, and of prejudging the people practicing these religions.

In this case, knowledge is both a support to teachers and a challenge. While Young reminds us that this knowledge is by definition constantly being developed by academics, teachers must have the opportunity to access it, and make this knowledge accessible to students.

The tools we have developed over the years attempt to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the classroom, thereby making complex knowledge accessible to both teachers and students. The promise is that students then discover the complexity of knowledge and the importance of making room for this complexity, in order to fully understand the society in which they live. It is in this sense that the use of knowledge contributes to preparing young people to exercise citizenship in a plural society.

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6

Powerful Knowledge or Big Ideas in Religious Education? Aims and Classroom Approaches

Michael J. Reiss

Context

Few school subjects arouse such strong passions as Religious Education, with some arguing that it should be banned from schools—as it is in many countries—and others that we have never had a greater need for high quality Religious Education than nowadays. Unsurprisingly, there has therefore been a long history of attempts to redefine the aims of the subject and critique classroom approaches to teaching it (e.g., Watson, 2012; Conroy et al., 2013; Gates, 2016).

A recent review of research on Religious Education in England is provided by Ofsted (2021). It begins:

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> In religious education (RE), pupils enter into a rich discourse about the religious and non-religious traditions that have shaped Great Britain and the world. RE in primary and secondary schools enables pupils to take their place within a diverse multi-religious and multi-secular society. At its best, it is intellectually challenging and personally enriching. It affords pupils both the opportunity to see the religion and non-religion in the world, and the opportunity to make sense of their own place in that world.

The review then goes on to point out that since Ofsted's previous review in 2013, a number of reports had been produced with a range of recommendations about the position of Religious Education either with specific reference to England or more generally. In 2013, the RE Council of England and Wales proposed a non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE, with three curriculum aims for pupils, namely that they should:

- Know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews.
- Express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions.
- Gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews. (Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2013, pp. 14–15)

In 2015, a pamphlet was authored by The Rt Hon Charles Clarke, the former Secretary of State for Education, and Professor Linda Woodhead, a well-respected British academic specialising in religious studies and the sociology of religion. In it they argued, inter alia, that:

- The current requirement in statute for an Act of Collective Worship should be abolished, and the decision about the form and character of school assemblies should be left to the governors of individual schools.
- Consideration be given to using the phrase 'Religious and Moral Education' rather than 'Religious Education' in describing this part of the statutory curriculum. (Clarke & Woodhead, 2015, pp. 63–64)

In 2018, the Commission on Religious Education produced a substantial report, the result of two years of consultation and debate. The first of its eight pages of recommendations was that the name of the subject should be changed to 'Religion and Worldviews'. It went on to argue that the subject should be statutory for learners in all publicly funded schools up to and including year 11, to make recommendations about its content and how it is inspected and to call for reforms in initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

I could go on. Depending on how you read the above, one can either see signs of vibrancy, of a subject with the confidence to ask deep questions about itself, or signs of desperation, of a subject that is floundering, prepared to envisage changing both its name and some of its core practices.

Powerful Knowledge

Much of the academic work on curricula is subject-specific, as in the case of the various reports about Religious Education mentioned above. However, one piece of curriculum theorising that has spawned a great deal of debate and has had considerable influence over the last couple of decades, Michael Young's thinking about powerful knowledge, cuts across subjects. His later arguments about the school curriculum have been coherently and powerfully expressed in a number of publications, of which perhaps the core text is his sole-authored *Bringing Knowledge Back In* (Young, 2008). In this book, Young argues for a social realist approach to knowledge that advances on two fronts: first, it is 'social' in that it takes seriously the fact that human knowledge is produced by people; secondly, it is 'realist' in that "A social theory must recognize that some knowledge is objective in ways that transcend the historical conditions of its production (e.g., Euclid's geometry and Newton's physics)" (Young, 2008, p. 28). This social realist approach allows Young to reject both relativism and postmodernism and also to avoid a naïve version of positivism (Reiss, 2018).

Drawing on both Durkheim's sociology of knowledge and Vygotsky's appreciation that "whereas a child's relationship to the world through his/

her everyday concepts is through what he/she sees or experiences directly, with scientific concepts, the relationship is mediated by these concepts, and is not dependent on direct experience" (Young, 2008, p. 51), Young then reaches two key conclusions. First, that "The curriculum cannot be based on everyday practical experience. Such a curriculum would only recycle that experience" (Young, 2008, p. 89), and, secondly, that "It is important to be cautious about replacing a curriculum based on specialist research and pedagogic communities with one based on the immediate practical concerns of employers or general criteria for employability such as key skills" (Young, 2008, p. 89).

An Aims-Based School Curriculum

A somewhat different approach that again cuts across the whole curriculum in arguing what schools should teach is provided by John White and me in our *An Aims-Based Curriculum* (Reiss & White, 2013). This publication attempts to provide a framework for the development of a coherent set of aims for the school curriculum, some for implementation at national level, others at the level of each school. The argument begins with the premise that the aim of the school curriculum is two-fold: to enable each learner to lead a life that is personally flourishing; and to help others to do so, too. It is then argued that a central aim of a school should therefore be to prepare students for a life of autonomous, whole-hearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences. This aim involves acquainting students with a wide range of possible options from which to choose. However, one needs to recognise that students vary in the extent to which they truly are able to make such choices, as these are often in large part determined by the students' family circumstances (think who chooses to study music or a second language) or the views of their teachers (who gets to study separate sciences as opposed to combined science course being a notable example).

John White and I go on to argue that we want children to want other people, as well as themselves, to lead fulfilling lives. This means not

hurting them, not lying to them, not breaking one's word or in other ways impeding them in this. It also means helping others to reach their goals, respecting their autonomy and being fair, friendly and cooperative in one's dealings with them. Schools can reinforce and extend what parents and others in families do in developing morality in children. Schools can widen students' moral sensitivity beyond the domestic circle to those in other communities, locally, nationally and globally. They can encourage students to reflect on the basis of morality, including whether this is religious or non-religious.

Michael Young's arguments about powerful knowledge and John White's and my arguments about human flourishing are often put in opposition—our own institution delights in doing so and Michael Young and I lead separate sessions on UCL's MA in Education course where each of us expounds our ideas. In reality, the two approaches complement one another well. John White and I see ourselves as asking a fundamental question about the aim of education. If one agrees that education is about maximising human flourishing—and that itself is a shorthand given that humanity is only one species on our planet—then Michael Young provides a very helpful set of arguments about what the *distinctive* contribution of a school might be. His answer, of course, is that it is to enable as many learners as possible to gain access to powerful knowledge, knowledge that will help them to understand themselves and to see the world in new ways and to provide them with access to new avenues of thought and practice, including in the world of work.

The next stage is to begin to apply these high-level arguments about the aim of schooling to specific subjects. Before getting on to Religious Education (continue to using this as an umbrella term, given the alternatives indicated earlier), I want to turn to the subject of science, partly because it enjoys a far more assured position within the school curriculum, partly because it is a subject with which I am very familiar and partly because, perhaps surprisingly, one particular set of arguments about how the content of the school science curriculum should be decided has had some influence on arguments about how the content of Religious Education should be decided.

Big Ideas in Science Education

Although science typically occupies a central spot in countries' school curricula, there has long been debate as to the aims of school science (Mansfield & Reiss, 2020). This debate is currently taking place when there is increasing realisation that scientific and technological developments long presumed to be entirely desirable—such as increased crop yields, falls in infant mortality and more general medical advances—have led to such increases in human population size that these, combined with ever-greater consumer demands, are leading to unsustainable pressures on the natural environment, as evidenced in global biodiversity declines and anthropogenic climate change. At the same time, there is a widespread assumption, particularly among governments, that national success—which is what governments are largely focused on, rather than global issues—is intrinsically linked with national advances in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) (Bencze et al., 2018).

Accordingly, school science education is often seen as having the aim of meeting a country's demand for scientists (scientists here can be interpreted broadly to include doctors, nurses, electricians and others). The main problem with this as *the* aim of school science is that even with a broad definition of 'scientists', it is evident that most people do not require much if any science for their employment. Accordingly, it is often argued that we need to teach science in school to enable 'scientific literacy'—the somewhat hopeful belief being that if school leavers understand more about science they will behave wisely when it comes to making decisions, either individuals or collectively, about such important matters as energy generation, the amelioration of anthropogenic climate change, vaccination and so forth.

Whatever the precise aim(s) of science education, it is widely agreed among science educators that too many students just don't get the big picture. Science lessons consist of an atomistic series of topics that don't join up in a student's mind. Jonathan Osborne puts it well:

> School science is suffering from a delusion that the science we offer must be both broad and balanced. The result is an attempt to offer a smattering of all sciences and to cram more and more into an oft-diminishing pot. Quite clearly, as the bounds of scientific knowledge expand from

> evolutionary biology to modern cosmology, more and more knowledge vies for a place on the curriculum. However, just as those teaching literature would never dream of attempting to cover the whole body of extant literature, choosing rather a range of examples to illustrate the different ways in which good literature can be produced, has the time not come to recognise that it is our responsibility to select a few of the major *explanatory* stories that the sciences offer? And surely it is the *quality of* the experience, rather than the quantity, which is the determining measure of a good science education? (Osborne, 2007, p. 175)

In an attempt to address this problem, there has been a growing move among curriculum developers to argue that science education should consider 'Big Ideas', namely ideas (or concepts) that are able to explain a wide range of scientific phenomena. These "ideas enable learners to see connections between different scientific ideas", and when these ideas are connected, it becomes easier to use them in new scenarios than other, unconnected ones (Harlen, 2015a, p. 97).

The Big Ideas movement in science education—for so it has become—had modest beginnings: a two-and-a-half-day residential seminar for 12 participants in a remote venue on the shore of Loch Lomond. This was paid for by Wynne Harlen using the money she was awarded for winning the 2009 Purkwa Prize. The resulting document *Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education* (Harlen, 2010) was followed by a companion document *Working with Big Ideas of Science Education* (Harlen, 2015b). Within a decade, the principle behind big ideas in science education had been incorporated into curricula in South Korea (Choi et al., 2011), Australia (Mitchell et al., 2016) and Chile (Bravo González & Reiss, 2021) and influenced science curricula and draft science curricula in a number of other countries.

Big Ideas in Religious Education

The effects of the Big Ideas movement in science education have spread to other subjects. This move has been facilitated in England by advice given to the National Curriculum Review Group by Tim Oates (2010) that students should study fewer things but in greater depth in order to

secure deeper learning in subjects (Reiss, 2023). In Religious Education, Barbara Wintersgill organised a three-day symposium, which I was asked to Chair, on the possibility of developing the notion of big ideas for Religious Education; this resulted in *Big Ideas for Religious Education* (Wintersgill, 2017).

Big Ideas for Religious Education discusses what Big Ideas are (including the notion that they provide criteria for the selection and prioritising of subject knowledge in the curriculum, are transferable to events outside the classroom, are memorable, and capable of differentiation so that they may become the basis of progression) and are not (including that they do not provide a philosophy of education, do not presume any particular pedagogy, do not prescribe any specific content, are not themes or concepts found in individual subjects, are not intended to be a prescriptive programme, and do not assume which or how many religions and non-religious worldviews are being studied). It then goes on to identify six Big Ideas:

Big Idea 1 Continuity, Change and Diversity
Big Idea 2 Words and Beyond
Big Idea 3 A Good Life
Big Idea 4 Making Sense of Life's Experiences
Big Idea 5 Influence, Community, Culture and Power
Big Idea 6 The Big Picture. (Wintersgill, 2017, p. 15)

To give some specific examples, here is what is recommended for 5–7-year-olds and 14–16-year-olds for Big Idea 3, 'A Good Life':

> **5–7**
>
> Most religions and non-religious worldviews introduce children to stories from the lives of their exemplary people as examples of the qualities and characteristics they might try to achieve. They also teach about specific actions that are right and wrong and about good and bad attitudes. This guidance can help people treat each other fairly and live together without upsetting or hurting each other or damaging the environment.
>
> **14–16**
>
> Religious and non-religious groups agree on some moral issues and disagree on others. They may have different reasons for their views and they may disagree with each other and among themselves about how to inter-

> pret their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, and how to apply these ideas to difficult moral questions of today. People have different theories, which may be religious or non-religious, about how and why we ought to live a good life. Some teach 'virtue theory'. They say that in order to lead a moral life we should concentrate on developing a good character and good personal virtues such as generosity and compassion, which would then make us behave generously or compassionately. Others teach deontological theories. They say that the way to lead a moral life is to do one's duty or to follow the rules which tell us what is good or bad, right or wrong. A third group teach consequentialism. They say that we ought to act in the way that brings about the best overall results, no matter what those acts are. When people discuss contemporary moral issues from these perspectives, they may come up with very different answers. One of the big moral questions which is relevant for religious and non-religious worldviews alike is whether or not there are unchanging moral rules. Are there rules that apply to all people and at all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or does right and wrong depends on context and circumstance? Many moral conflicts result from clashes between these two points of view. This is partly because ideas about morality are closely connected to a group's core teachings about Ultimate Reality, what it is to be human and how we should relate to our planet. Various religious and non-religious organisations have tried to identify rules and principles that should apply universally. (Wintersgill, 2017, p. 19)

One interesting question is the extent to which these recommendations cohere with the notion of powerful knowledge. The recommendations themselves will not be unfamiliar to those who know what is typically taught in Religious Education in England at these ages. One of the notable features is the use of the phrase 'non-religious worldviews', in line with, though pre-dating, the recommendation, mentioned above, of the Commission on Religious Education (2018).

The recommendations for 5–7-year-olds do exhibit a number of instances of powerful knowledge, namely that we can learn from the lives of exemplary people, that there are specific actions and attitudes that are right and wrong, and that using this knowledge can help us live together in community—and there is a brief nod to broader environmental concerns. The recommendations for 14–16-year-olds similarly exhibit a number of instances of powerful knowledge, notably that both religious

and non-religious groups agree on some moral issues and disagree on others, that virtue ethics, deontology and consequentialism are three major theories that can help us decide how and why (though this axiological claim seems somewhat ambitious) we should live a good life.

What, though, I think is interesting is the way in which what the recommendations seem, as students get older, to illustrate is not so much assured knowledge but the need for reflection and discussion—cf. "When people discuss contemporary moral issues from these perspectives [virtue theory, deontology and consequentialism], they may come up with very different answers" and "Are there rules that apply to all people and at all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or does right and wrong depends on context and circumstance?" These suggest not so much big ideas or powerful knowledge as big questions and open-minded approach to knowledge.

There is a similarity here with science education in that science, in its epistemology, prides itself on its openness to new ways of thinking and of understanding the world. Think of how humanity moves from a range of ancient views about the structure of the cosmos to a Ptolemaic understanding, to a Newtonian concept, to one determined by Einstein's theory of relativity in which space, time and gravity are no longer independent but intimately connected. Something of this is reflected in Harlen's Big Idea 12, 'Scientific explanations, theories and models are those that best fit the facts known at a particular time':

> A scientific theory or model representing relationships between variables or components of a system must fit the observations available at the time and lead to predictions that can be tested. Any theory or model is provisional and subject to revision in the light of new data even though it may have led to predictions in accord with data in the past. Every model has its strengths and limitations in accounting for observations. (Harlen, 2010, p. 23)

However, when it comes to the recommended content of what Harlen refers to as 'Ideas *of* science' (as opposed to 'Ideas *about* science', such as Big Idea 12), the proposals are much more definite than they are in Wintersgill's Big Ideas for Religious Education. Here, for example, is the recommendation for Big Idea 1, 'All material in the Universe is made of very small particles':

> Atoms are the building blocks of all materials, living and non-living. The behaviour of the atoms explains the properties of different materials. Chemical reactions involve rearrangement of atoms in substances to form new substances. Each atom has a nucleus containing neutrons and protons, surrounded by electrons. The opposite electric charges of protons and electrons attract each other, keeping atoms together and accounting for the formation of some compounds. (Harlen, 2010, p. 21)

So, this would seem to suggest an important difference between powerful knowledge in science and powerful knowledge in religion. Put at its bluntest, for all that science is open to the possibility of changes in what we know about reality, some knowledge about the material world is very robust. We can safely teach in school science such scientific conclusions as matter is made up of atoms, objects can affect other objects at a distance, changing the speed or direction of movement of an object requires a net force to be acting on it, energy is conserved, organisms are organised on a cellular basis, genetic information is passed down from one generation of organisms to another, and the diversity of organisms, living and extinct, is the result of evolution. The last of these conclusions is a reminder that there are some students for whom science can be controversial but that is not a reason not to teach such knowledge in school science but rather to use appropriate pedagogical strategies in such teaching so that students are respected while accepted science is taught (e.g., Reiss, 2019).

In Religious Education, however, much of what we want students to know is not so much to do with reality but with people's perceptions or interpretations of reality. Nowadays, certainly in places with the sort of liberal democracies that we still just about have in Europe and a number of other countries, any student who comes to their Religious Education lessons hoping definitively to find out whether God exists, whether miracles take place or whether scripture can be relied on as an arbiter in moral matters is likely to be disappointed. Rather than such questions being answered directly, our student is more likely to learn about the arguments for and against the answers that might be given to such questions, and how these answers relate to the cultural, historical and faith circumstances of those answering them.

This is not, of course, the fault of Religious Education or of Religious Education teachers—it is more to do with the nature of knowledge in religion as opposed to in science. Indeed, science is somewhat out on a limb here. One doesn't learn literature or even history to learn unambiguously whether Joyce or Proust is the greater writer (and the question is pretty meaningless anyway) or what definitively caused the start of the First World War. It may be that Michael Young's powerful knowledge arguments—and we should remember that Young started his professional life as a chemistry teacher—apply more straightforwardly to some subjects than to others.

The Importance of the Site of Learning

A final issue to do with Religious Education that applies to a much greater extent than with other school subjects is how what is taught might depend on the nature of the school. In addition, issues to do with schools' admission policies and collective worship have featured strongly in England in recent policy documents to do with Religious Education, religion and schools. Here, though, I continue to concentrate on issues to do with aims and classroom approaches.

The Common School

I use the term 'common school' as it is generally used, deriving from common schools in the USA in the nineteenth century that existed as community-funded (i.e., parents did not pay school fees) instruments of education for all (or at least the great majority of) children in a region or neighbourhood (Curti, 1935). The central point here is that in the common school, assuming (though many would argue that the conclusion of this paragraph holds even if one does not make this assumption) that a diversity of religious positions exists among the students and/or their parents/guardians, Religious Education cannot validly favour one particular religion, denomination or non-religious worldview. The education that needs to be provided, given that religion is a contestable subject (i.e.,

epistemically controversial—Hand, 2006), has to be both balanced and pluralist, introducing learners to a range of faith and non-faith positions. This is not, of course, naively to presume that school students are capable of choosing between these various religions, denominations or non-religious worldviews, as they might choose between different meal options at their school canteen, but rather to acknowledge that the favouring of one position over others is unacceptable.

There are many who would hold that this conclusion holds whatever the type of school but it is possible to argue that this is not the case.

Independent Schools

In the case of independent (i.e., fee-paying) schools, one material difference is that whereas in some common school systems, parents have little or no choice as to where their children are educated, independent schools generally operate within a market economy. At its crudest, therefore, just as I can choose to send my child to a school on the grounds of its musical excellence or other aspect of its curriculum or ethos (such as an emphasis on the development of the 'whole child' rather than a focus on academic excellence), so I should be able to send my child to a school that presumes/teaches the validity of the religion, denomination or non-religious worldview that I espouse.

This argument has received some support from those who argue that the developing child cannot initially question everything. In the case of religion, they may benefit, if they come from a religious family, by attending a school where there is congruence between the school's and their family's position. A school might therefore nurture (Nelson, 2019) the faith tradition of a child, always remembering that precisely the same argument holds for atheist/humanist parents who want to send their children to schools that are congruent with their non-faith tradition(s).

Faith Schools

Much of the above argument about independent schools applies also to faith schools, given that payment for education is not really the relevant

issue here. However, what is important is parental choice, and here geography matters. If one lives in London and wants to send one's child to a Jewish school, freedom of choice indeed obtains, given the relative ease of public transport within London and the number of different types of schools that are available. However, if one is a parent who lives in a village and the one village school is a Church of England primary school (as is not infrequently the case in England, given that just over a quarter of all primary schools are Church of England, with almost an additional one in ten being Roman Catholic), one may have considerably less freedom of choice, especially if one does not own a car and cannot afford to.

The charge here is that faith schools are indoctrinatory. On the other hand, there are those who would argue that society more generally can be indoctrinatory (or worse) and school may provide a refuge from that. Parker-Jenkins et al. (2014) present case studies of Jewish and Muslim faith schools. They argue that these schools help sustain their own religious heritage while also engaging with, and providing a place of safety from, the wider community, given the widespread existence of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Home Schooling

A final type of schooling we can consider is home schooling. While in a number of countries either in law or in practice schools can act *in loco parentis*, home schooling obviously enables parents to exercise particular control over the education that their children receive. Although there are clear dangers with home schooling—it can cover up parental abuse (Bartholet, 2020) and lead to a distorted education (Scaramanga, 2017)—countries are frequently reluctant to prohibit it (though it is illegal in a number of countries including Costa Rica, Cuba, Iran, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey), no doubt in part through fear of alienating parents.

There is a range of reasons why parents home educate; but a common one is to do with religion (de Waal & Theron, 2003). In a study in USA, religious and moral reasons were commonly given, as instanced by the parent who responded, "I have had a child in public school for one year.

Oh my!!!! They are not anywhere on our planet. We desire to raise our children to honor God and to love and serve others" (Thomas, 2019, p. 30).

The reality is that it is unfeasible, and some would even argue undesirable, to require parents who home educate their children to provide a balanced Religious Education. It's hard enough to get certain schools to teach evolution even in countries that require it to be taught as part of the curriculum—for an example, see the account in Franken and Levrau (2020) of how Haredi school (ultra-orthodox Jewish schools) in Belgium avoid teaching evolution and other 'controversial' issues.

Lifelong Learning

Learning does not end once we leave school, further or higher education. Although the notion of lifelong learning may seem a little strange with respect to Religious Education, the reality is that all of us continue to learn about religion throughout our lives. There is a large literature on how religion is portrayed in the media. In a content analysis of local and national news articles, Nickerson (2019) analysed the US media's portrayal of selected terrorist events in France and Turkey. He found that:

> news media framing utilizes biased, negative imagery, portraying the events in these countries in a way that reinforces current prejudices against Muslims, even when Muslims are themselves the victims. This unequal reporting increases viewership while simultaneously allowing current perceptions about terrorism and Muslims to continue. (Nickerson, 2019, p. 547)

Nowadays, of course, almost all of us learn from social media as well as from conventional media. In a systematic review of the representation of Islam within social media, despite Muslim preachers and scholars running blogs, Facebook Pages and Twitter groups that endeavour to deliver comprehensive information about Islam, the authors concluded:

> Although the representation of Islam in social media is wide-ranging, more empirical studies found that social media users represent Islam negatively than studies which revealed positive view of Islam by social media users. (Hashmi et al., 2021, p. 1962)

Such findings along with widespread uncritical endorsement or rejection of religion indicate the important role that formal education can and should play in enabling school leavers critically to examine the claims they hear, while remaining open to new ideas about religious and non-religious worldviews and their potential to enhance human flourishing and a sustainable planet.

Conclusions

Michael Young's ideas about powerful knowledge have had a strong influence on school curricula in a number of countries, despite the danger that they can be high-jacked by those with a narrow, outdated, naïve and even discriminatory approach to education. Independently, there have been parallel movements advocating an aims-based approach to the curriculum (Michael Reiss and John White) or an approach that begins with the Big Ideas of Religious Education (Barbara Wintersgill and colleagues).

By comparing the nature of knowledge in science and in religious studies, I conclude on epistemological grounds that it seems likely that Young's arguments about powerful knowledge cannot be applied to Religious Education in the way they can to some other school subjects. What we need Religious Education in schools to do is to enable school leavers critically to examine the claims about religion that they hear, while remaining open to new ideas about religious and non-religious worldviews and their potential to enhance human flourishing and ensure a sustainable planet.

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7

The Role of Knowledge, Knowledge Processes and Experience in the RE Curriculum

Marios Koukounaras Liagkis

Introduction

Starting with the words of Saint John of Damaskus (1864, p. 594A) in his Dialectic that 'nothing is more valuable than knowledge; knowledge is the light of the soul and ignorance is the darkness', as an author of this chapter, I have to claim in advance that I am glossing the issue of knowledge in Religious Education (RE) mostly with a lamp as Diogenes the Cynic inquiring the notion of knowledge than possessing it. I admit that I realised emphatically that when I met Michael Young in London in 2014 and he stated that he still has persisted epistemological questions. It is worth saying that I interviewed him then seeking answers about RE curriculum development, a project which I had undertaken in Greece, and was eager to find an answer to whether RE is or can be a powerful knowledge subject.

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This is, however, the topic of this chapter, and since 2014, a concrete theoretical basis that is based on my research has been illustrating more what Young asked me then: *What knowledge does RE in Greece deliver, and is it of cardinal importance to all students?*

First and foremost in my research, knowledge is considered a valuable and high deed, acquisition and dominance over what there is to know: the knowns, such as people (acquaintance knowledge) and facts (knowledge-that), and knowing, the procedures of knowing the knowns (knowledge how) (Ryle, 1949; Russell, 1912; Dewey & Bentley, 1949). In sharing the truth, therefore, knowledge can be defined by dwelling on the origins of Greek-Byzantine philosophy (Bradshaw, 2006; Lossky, 1997; John of Damascus, 2012) or on contemporary pragmatistic theories (Putnam, 1994b; Misak, 2018). The difference between them is that the first understands the 'sharing' principle as an in whole- or in part-participation to what exists, actually to how God manifests himself to others (these are God's energies/attributes) and the latter as a valuable, beneficial, and useful—practical in one word—result of inquiry which is answerable to some independent world since 'truth is sometimes recognition-transcendent because what goes on in the world is sometimes beyond our power to recognize, even when it is not beyond our power to conceive' (Putnam, 1994a, p. 516). Knowledge is considered an experience on one hand, and a cognitive practice on the other. Its acquisition actually is a transformative process according to Socrates. It is not just a piece of information but an energetic and drastic manifestation of what was learned. Yet despite the recognition of the different types of knowledge: factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 38), the last two types have been met by a seeming scepticism when they are related to students; an experience which I think Michael Young shared to some extent in his publications on knowledge-based approach to curriculum where students' experience is a contested issue in knowledge construction (Young, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2013b, 2014b, 2015, 2021; Young & Muller, 2013; Young et al., 2014).

In this chapter, I will explore the role of knowledge in the RE curriculum. I will start with Young's notion of power knowledge, comparing it with the concepts of the Greek paideia (αγωγή/παιδεία) and the German Bildung echoing the Biesta's education (εκπαίδευση) and his distinction

between 'cultivation humanity' and 'educating the human'. Then I will elaborate, firstly, with Dewey's theory of knowing works hand in hand with substantive knowledge and its transformative power in individuals' life where the other is more than significant and, secondly, on the nature of learning with its knowledge processes and its different ways of knowing that make available the achievement of comparable learning outcomes and of deeper and broader knowledge which connects learners with the world in purposeful ways (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). My attention is to create a theoretical ground where the answer to the question regarding the knowledge that constitutes RE as a subject and the findings of my research will illuminate the topic and the notion of religious knowledge as experience, as a significant 'what' which is as important as the 'how' in education. Content and process are perceived here as an educational experience (thinking, reflection and action). Finally, I will discuss that within the RE curriculum context, the 'language games' of religion(s), in fact, the religious literacy that the school provides, facilitates students' knowledge processes and therefore communication with self and others, provided that experiential learning teaching applies within the classroom. Thus, the RE's content applies in 'events with the meaning' from which contributions to knowledge-based teaching are made possible.

Powerful Knowledge

The concept of powerful knowledge in Michael Young's writing which answers the question 'What is the important knowledge that pupils should be able to acquire at school?' (Young, 2013a, p. 102) is the epicentre of this particular study. Obviously, he advocates for an open—not fixed—specialized knowledge of each discipline that has an explanatory value to those who have access to it. This means that it provides: (a) 'more reliable explanations and new ways of thinking about the world', (b) 'learners with a language for engaging in political, moral, and other kinds of debates' (Young, 2008, p. 14), it 'helps us to go beyond our individual experiences' (Young, 2013b, p. 196) as well as it predicts, it explains, it enables us to envisage alternatives (Young, 2014b, p. 74). Not only science but also social sciences and humanities can analyse and explain the

observations of the real world and build a theoretical framework (Goertz, 2006; Epstein, 2019; Nordgren, 2017; Biesta, 2021).

Although the meaning of knowledge-based curriculum development and subject teaching has been an influential approach to education in the last decade, RE has had little influence, as the intellectual power that school religious knowledge can provide has been questioned for several decades and admittedly has not been well researched. RE not only is a subject with a contested valuable content but also needs to take into account a discontinuity between the culture of the curriculum and school knowledge and the culture that different groups of students acquire in their homes and communities that they bring to school, as well as in many RE national contexts that follow different types of RE (confessional, non-confessional, mono-religious, multi-religious, and so on (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2018)) in curriculum development, according to Young (2008, p. 13). Moreover, RE is probably the only curriculum subject in which the classroom practice depends not only on the teachers' personal philosophical approach to knowledge, but also on the students' religious belongings and commitments (if any) and their (ir)religious beliefs (Jackson & Everington, 2017; Arthur et al., 2019, pp. 21–22; Conroy, 2016; Heil, 2019, pp. 198–202). Apart from this, it is not totally acceptable to generalise any research on schools' religious knowledge, as different religious traditions in different educational contexts produce different types, approaches and applications of RE (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2018; Lenganger-Krogstad, 2013).

Still, there is something common in those different contexts: the what and how of the curriculum and teaching. The how of knowledge is valuable in the production and transmission of knowledge. This means that active learning in educational environments provides concrete educational experiences of different disciplines and subjects such as RE. The school experience is the actual discipline based on knowledge which, therefore, 'transcends and liberates children from their daily experiences' (Young, 2013a, p. 118) as a cognitive process. What differentiates Young's view from the realistic or pragmatistic views without provoking polarisation or cleavages, though raising a number of questions, is the emphasis on (a) the focus and the objects of study, based on the existence of boundaries between disciplines and subjects, on the one hand, and that the

boundaries are not fixed but changeable, on the other hand, (b) the relationship between the school's knowledge and the learners' lives where, on the one hand, knowledge is a discipline-based experience which transforms students' action and consequently transcends their everyday experiences, and, on the other hand, there are conceptual boundaries between school and everyday knowledge (Young, 2009b).

Paideia and Bildung

Attempting to identify RE knowledge that could be deemed as powerful by Young's concept, the Greek paideia (αγωγή/παιδεία) and the German Bildung may offer compelling arguments to develop advocacy that RE can be a powerful knowledge-led subject providing power knowledge that influences students' intellectual thinking, values and actions and takes them well beyond their own experience. Paideia is a broader concept than education, and especially, school education in the Greek language contains both intellectual and spiritual cultivation within a culture. Even if it seems that it implies a kind of civilisation or even indoctrination, it doesn't. The word *αγωγή* derived from the ancient Greek verb *άγω* (guide) is the basis and presupposition both of paideia and of education. Primarily, *αγωγή* describes education as the cultivation of mentality and behaviour according to accepted norms of the community which is, first and foremost, essential for the bringing up of a child. Agency of individuals and emancipation are the criteria that differentiate paideia (παιδεία) from education (εκπαίδευση). In education, someone else may decide and guide the students (parents, curriculum, teacher), but after the Enlightenment, the scope of education in school becomes gradual such that students may not need guidance to be able to control their own learning processes and the outcomes. For this, students in schools are educated in different types of knowledge from differentiated disciplines and curriculum subjects (science, social and humanities-containing religion) which are valuable for the students' body, mind and soul in analysing, explaining, interpreting, understanding self, others and the world, participating in dialogues and debates in the public sphere and envisaging alternative futures, and, above all, going beyond the limits of

their own experience. If these preconditions do not exist in the education of the children in schools, then they will always need *αγωγή* even as adults. The Spartan education was *αγωγή* since it was a solitary lifelong training in military discipline and obedience to the laws. They were educated, but they were not lettered, erudite and multi-literate (listed religious literacy) in a pedagogical perspective (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001).

In the German context, the notion of cultivation in paideia is explained better by the concepts of *Ausbildung*, *Bildung* and *Erziebung* according to Biesta and his terms of qualification, socialisation and subjectification, which are education's purposes or domains of educational purpose (Biesta, 2010, p. 21, 2021, pp. 11–14). Qualification is the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which is regarded as having religious significance and enables individuals with the capacities to act in knowledgeable and skilful ways. Their actions, however, need an orientation through traditions, cultures and practices (such as religious ones) in order for students as subjects 'to live their lives in complex, modern societies' (Biesta, 2021, pp. 9, 11). Socialisation and subjectification make qualification a powerful process. Knowing about religion(s) from the outside helps students to interpret and analyse themselves, others and the world. The perspective from the inside that socialisation seeks to bring gives the knowledge of traditions and practices the meaning of intellectual and existential experience that have provided students with new ways of thinking and explaining the world. The socialising dimension creates the fostering framework within which meta-narratives in the postmodern era and knowledge communities are unavoidable (Nordgren, 2017, p. 671), while on the parallel, subjectification puts the students' everyday world in relation to specialised knowledge, as an existential and ontological process and thus important to RE. That is what distinguishes religious *αγωγή* from religious *παιδεία*, the work of Erziehung. It is very much about identification, what the students do with their identities and what they acquired in school and not about cultivation which is a problematic aspect of RE as a school endeavour. Biesta, referring to Benner's (2015) view of cultivation, understood it better as 'summoning the child or young person to be a self' (Biesta, 2021, p. 15) and independent thinker with the sense of freedom and excitement that the knowledge can offer (Young, 2014b, p. 20). This is an ontological endeavour in which the essential

component is the freedom to self-affirm the participation of the self in several types of relationships that the child can have with others (Zizioulas, 2007). Paradoxically, to identify the 'self' relies on the relationship and acquaintance of the other who can be for the Greek Fathers, the Christian theologians, the God himself.

RE in the modern world, regardless of its type and religious affiliation, contains this possibility while it should not aim to. It is a self-transformation that school's knowledge can evoke in learners' lives transcending students'. everyday experiences and development of the consciousness within the community (society) where religion(s) have their active role for believers and collateral consequences to the lives of all individuals regardless of their relationship with any religion. In an RE class, religion and culture are the elements of socialisation and subjectification. To learn about 'Muslims' is an educational process that is in itself part of a process of social classification. Redistribution goes on in the classroom (Buchardt, 2012). The others have a semantic role in this process. An understanding of what it means to be a Muslim is a power knowledge because it develops the students' understanding of Muslims' lives and 'is also a way of shaping the understanding of Muslims present as well as those in the local context ('formation')' (Skeie, 2012, p. 90). This means that knowledge and formation are decisively interrelated but also have different dimensions in RE in a way that knowledge depends on formation.

Thus, RE functions as paideia and Bildung, which leads to the existential identification, a self-development and agency in relation to others and the environment, and basically with reference to alterity (Masschelein & Ricken, 2013). Echoing Levinas' thoughts, Biesta (2014a) indicated that this does not only make every human unique, but uniqueness is never in his/her possession and, therefore, there is nothing to be cultivated by any education. 'What it means to be human is approached educationally in terms of our existence-with-others rather than in terms of a nature of essence we already carry inside ourselves' (Biesta, 2014a, pp. 18–19). It is an individual's responsibility to realise their uniqueness through their response to the call of the other and education to build the framework and the environment where humans gain from outside the knowledge of the other and consequently of their selves. In this regard

'educating the human' is possible by defining the education process that arises from the outside to individuals as the 'power-knowledge' than the 'cultivating humanity' (Nussbaum, 1997) which is underpinned by the 'humanism of the self' (Biesta, 2014a, p. 18).

It is worth noting that for Byzantine and Orthodox theology, the other might be the 'Other' God (Lossky, 1974; Zizioulas, 2007). Given that every human being is the image of God, God is much exposed to humans' acquaintance. This might be the call to which a human being can respond realising his/her uniqueness while God, in these respects, is not 'beyond' the personal since 'personal existence could even be said to constitute the way God is' (Torrance, 2020, p. 12). This does not mean that RE has the responsibility to focus on the ways in which students might be 'singled out' by the call of God, when in fact God's existence is not acceptable to many of them. Education as paideia and Bildung can arrange to keep the possibility that a person's alterity can be reached and knowable, even God's alterity, 'without any guarantee, of course, that anything may emerge from this' call (Biesta, 2014a, p. 18). This is what RE can offer to modern society: substantive knowledge that has the potential power, depending on individuals' responsibility, to transform individuals' lives at personal and collective levels (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2022). These are the religious perspectives, ideas and concepts that function as the 'means' that make possible the learner's insights and thinking beyond common sense (Young, 2013a).

Powerful Religious Knowledge (?)

The question of whether religious knowledge of RE is powerful or maybe powerful has been lurking from the beginning of this chapter. I must note in advance that what makes the school's religious knowledge powerful is its potential to be powerful as a means and end of socialisation and identification. This means that RE as a subject can be a powerful knowledge course only when it functions as a resource for recognition and identification as well as for the development of critical understanding of the self, the communication with others and the world, cultures, religions, and of analytical thinking and autonomous learning skills (Council of Europe,

2018). Such religious literacy provided in school through the curriculum and its application in teaching is not only related to what students need to know about religion(s) in order 'to participate in conversations about the private and public powers of religions' (Prothero, 2007, p. 14) but also related to recognise religion(s) 'as a legitimate and important area for public attention' (Dinham & Jones, 2010, p. 6). This knowledge provides students the powerful ability, to make informed choices about the beliefs that influence their moral understandings' highlighting 'the moral goods of increasing understanding, respect and tolerance, and responsible political and civic engagement' (Richardson, 2017, p. 364). From the above, it is apparent that if religious knowledge in schools is limited to factual knowledge, it loses inevitably its dynamics that are deemed substantial in relation to life ethics and the individuals' existential questions. Frank, in addition, pointed out that RE involves more than the development of essential competencies such as linguistic, reflective, conceptual and analytical ones. Curriculum religious literacy calls for students to acquire what allows them 'to navigate different domains in life' (Biesta et al., 2019, p. 25) and, therefore, it calls them to action using their knowledge to interpret 'what a good life may be' and what characterises someone as 'being good' (Frank, 2017, p. 35). These ethical and hermeneutic dynamics of religious knowledge support self-identification and communication with others 'with understanding with/or about world opinions (the other)' (Roux, 2010, p. 998).

Expounding on school religious knowledge, we should mention that experience, action and language are essential components of religious knowledge. In other words, they constitute religious knowledge as a human creation that depends on the cultural context of the individual. In school, it is produced through experience while it is deemed as an experience itself which is 'useful' for the interpretation of oneself, of others and of the world. It is an experience of what exists in the world. As a process, it is a classroom interactive, interpersonal and co-dialectical process that requires specific actions, producing new actions and interactions by reflecting on the importance of the different actions and their consequences contained in the classroom activity. Thus, education becomes transformative education on personal and collective levels (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2020; Biesta, 2014b). This process of transaction of individuals

and their environments involves thinking, reflection and, of course, action, which for Dewey is 'literally something which we do' (Dewey, 1916, p. 331), a transformational act.

This school knowledge does not exist in some form outside of the individuals' minds, nor does it take place at some point in space and time outside of them though it really exists as the natural truth. The natural truth really exists, according to Putnam (1994a, pp. 516–517), so students in school are called to approach in many ways different disciplines—one of them is RE. It is produced in specific ecological situations and spatiotemporal contexts by the individuals themselves, who produce it through learning and specific cognitive processes (experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying) (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, pp. 238–249) and approaches to the truth. Thus, it is determined by the individuals' environment as well as the ecological–experiential dimension of human behaviour to define their reality, the relationships with the world around them and the different meanings (functional connections) that emerge. There are also religious meanings amongst them and in fact different meanings in different religious environments. If so, then there is no question of whether or not knowledge is true, but the possibilities it has are essential (Biesta & Hannam, 2016). And this seems to be of utmost importance for education in general, and RE in particular.

To operate this process in RE practice, teaching should always serve the cognitive processes of experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying regardless of the duration of the lesson. A teacher plans and applies lessons accordingly with specific outcomes that can be assessed. These are behaviours that students are expected to achieve during, by the end of and after the lesson in different cognitive levels/processes (remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating), in three learning domains, namely, the cognitive, affective and psychomotor (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 215), and in different types and levels of knowledge—factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 38).

A research in the RE field in Greece (2017–2019) addressed that when teachers remain traditional in teaching, namely following instructional modes of teaching and preserving a hierarchical location of authority in the classroom, where responses required are more likely to involve a lower

level of skills and critical thinking (Erricker, 2010, p. 44), the students perceive the knowledge they acquire in school as factual knowledge; that is, they learn the basics needed to know about a scientific field or to solve a problem that concerns this field (terminology, specific and detailed information). Besides, they identify it as knowledge about faith/religion, at the age of 13–14, and as knowledge about faith/religion or no knowledge at all, at the age of 16–17 (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2022). The answer 'I did not learn anything' in any case remains shocked since the students themselves verify their knowledge as powerless and weak. On the contrary, when RE offers opportunities for transformative education where the classroom experience are 'events with meaning' (Dewey, 1929, p. 240), which means that it establishes a productive and meaningful connection between the curriculum and the students, a transaction of them and their environments (Dewey, 1920, p. 86), not only that the emphasis is on skills and attitudes required to construct high-level knowledge, persuasive argument and new knowledge-based experience, but also students effectively identify what they learn during the lessons, ascertaining which religious knowledge (learning level and type of knowledge) contributes towards a change in their behaviour. A 15-year-old student commented in a journal on what he/she had learnt in RE in the research in Greece: 'There are many goals this year in RE. I feel that we understand… human rights, that we are all equal, that we do not judge diversity, but also to understand other religions and be active in society and be able to help as much as we can. And I understand these through active participation and being active in any activity in the classroom…I felt that all my body, my mind and my soul were actively learnt…' These cognitive and meta-cognitive dynamics of the RE teaching renewed rationalist Hirst's idea of individual's cultivation through the acquisition of knowledge (Hirst, 1974, p. 22), where religion has its position, with the transactional relationship between the knowing and the known (Dewey & Bentley, 1949), while knowings are related to the 'what' and 'how' of the visible known and the invisible parts (Carlgren, 2020). Thus, religious concepts used in certain ways are what students should acquire in RE. This means that the power derives both from theory and practice, the concepts as knowledge of known and the way they are used as knowing the known. This is central to RE and RE teaching as well where factual

and procedural knowledge constitutes the content of the curriculum, the way of teaching and acquisition of knowledge and in the end what the students are capable to do with knowing the known, these are called competencies. Precious paideia-Bildung is offered to students in schools through teaching powerful disciplinary's knowledge. What makes this paideia precious and different in comparison to other curriculum subjects is that RE as a content teaches students who already have religious or non-religious beliefs, the involvement in a religious community or any relationship to any religion, and different religions' meanings that illustrate different aspects of the truth or how different communities and their faith believe in one truth.

What is stressed by the above is that when religions are taught in a school setting, the interplay between individuals' previous knowledge and depictions and what the curriculum provides as a powerful knowledge that develops specific powerful ways of knowing seems quite complex but intrinsic too as RE remains an integral part of modern education in many educational systems around the world.

Religious knowledge is seen more as a language amongst other languages in the curriculum, its grammar being of benefit to the students in providing them with the hermeneutic tools to interpret the world, to communicate and to understand themselves and others. In another research (2011–2015) in a Greek high school on what knowledge students acquire in RE based on their concept and constructs of knowledge, the conclusion may help us to understand the above interplay and also the horizontal inter-disciplinary relationship of RE teaching with the other curriculum subjects. According to this conclusion (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2020), RE teaching literally functions as the knowledge of known which are the concepts with a focus on knowing which is the conceptualisation of religious concepts (e.g., sin, nirvana, etc.) and at the same time, the religious conceptualization of the concepts (e.g., love, freedom, etc.) which are the core, the big ideas of the school education 'having great transfer value; applying to many inquiries and issues over time—horizontally (across subjects) and vertically (through the years in later courses) in the curriculum and out of school' (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006, p. 69). These concepts and this process are beneficial to students

and their lives since they help them understand and interpret themselves, others, the world and if they have any belief in God, their faith. This can then be deemed as powerful knowledge because it provides students with the key concepts in interpretation of the world and the self. Given that religious knowledge has such dynamics consequently, the research provides evidence for the value of teaching religion(s) in school. RE is an integral part of the knowledge-based curriculum as a subject, a social and pedagogic practice that teaches one more valued language amongst others in the school environment. As in any language with its own 'language game' (Wittgenstein, 2009), the religious notions, that differently compared to other languages conceptualise the reality of individuals' contexts, are essential for communication and interpretation and are also seen as necessary as they are concerned with the individuals' existence and they organically function in the real world. The knowledge of the religious 'mother tongue' (if is any) is essential not only because it is a basic component of the personal development (Kapogiannis et al., 2009; Day, 2017; Furrow et al., 2004) but also because it is valuable for education according to human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicates the right to an education that promotes understanding and tolerance between national, racial or religious groups, according to the article 2 which guarantees the rights and freedoms of those of all religions, to article 18 which demands freedom of thought, religious belief and practice and to article 26 that articulates the right to education (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013). Moreover, the European Convention of Human Rights maintains that 'everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, and to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance' (article 9.1) but that 'freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.' (article 9.2).

Discussion

In this chapter, I have explored the role of knowledge in the RE curriculum tracing evidence of how RE, which is open to 'otherness' and world religions, functions as a curriculum subject in a school education that offers paideia (αγωγή/παιδεία) and Bildung. These two concepts help us to understand, in relation to the position of religion in school, that religious knowledge can be a powerful knowledge provided that it is offered in a transformative educational environment. In this, the what and the how of the RE engage with knowing or knowledge processes. If this is issued, then all the students will have the right to get access to RE and RE becomes a right of all students, so to speak.

My research on what knowledge constitutes RE in the school illustrates that religious knowledge is powerful if it educates humans. The concept of education, however, is, on the one hand, based on Dewey's theory of learning and knowledge where learning is a transactional experience between students and their environments which supports thinking, reflection and action and, on the other hand, it is based on Biesta's curriculum theory that especially regards RE education and his elaboration on the Dewey's pragmatism. This means that the knowledge is developed in each person according to his/her context, that is, it is a subjective and an intersubjective production that occurs in a specific environment. It affects individuals and the world around them by evoking them to change their behaviours, after thinking and reflecting on the religious notion that the concepts have. This knowledge is factual as well as procedural and relates to the ability of students to understand, apply, analyse, evaluate and create/produce/compose. In other words, it concerns the highest levels of learning and certainly the fields of knowledge of principles and ideas, especially procedural knowledge and meta-cognition. It is powerful knowledge when it supports individuals to know and understand themselves, others and the world through the lens of religion(s) which provides them with the big ideas that their acquisition is an intersubjective hermeneutic tool to lead them to a personal formation, to a 'good education' with the three purposes of qualification, socialisation and subjectification. This knowledge is existentially and ontologically decisive and therefore valuable for human life.

In practice, this knowledge is produced when RE is based on the religious, the theological, content and is taught in RE lessons by experiential and transformative pedagogies as the study has shown. Then it has valuable results for a powerful knowledge-based education, especially in terms of providing learners with 'more reliable explanations and new ways of thinking about the world', and 'a language for engaging in political, moral, and other kinds of debates' (Young, 2008, p. 14), and of helping them 'to go beyond (their) individual experiences' (Young, 2013b, p. 196) as well as to envisage alternatives (Young, 2014b, p. 74).

The implication to RE teaching practice of a powerful knowledge RE is obvious since it is based on transformative and experiential learning principles of teaching which transcends students' everyday experiences by facilitating students' knowledge processes and therefore communication with self and others. Of course, I think that this study cannot be generally accepted as it starts from a basis that is developed on philosophical axioms. However, I will continue to have the Diogenes the Cynic's lamp on, in view of the fact that more research is needed, in different educational contexts and types of RE to apply Young's theory to the educational reality of RE.

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8

Religion: A Legitimate Anomaly in Education?

Leni Franken

Introduction

From its very beginning, education in Europe was closely related to religion: in order to nurture children and young adolescents with the Christian faith, the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican churches have established schools all over Europe. Although this Christian education system steadily secularized, old traces of the Christian approach are still to be found in education: Christian (and other) faith-based schools are (partly) subsidized by the state in most European nations and in addition, a substantial number of state schools offer denominational religious education. In this contribution, I will show that this kind of *religious* education or education 'into' religion is, as regards organization, aims, content, and methodology, substantially different from liberal education and is therefore an anomaly in education. Moreover, even in a more 'modest' critical form, religious education, which starts from a

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partisan insider's perspective rather than from an impartial outsider's perspective, is hard to defend. Alternatively, *religion* education or education 'about' religion is, with regard to organization, aims, content, and methodology, better in line with the liberal education paradigm.

In order to make this clear, this contribution proceeds as follows: after a general outline of the organization, aims, content, and methodology of liberal education (§2), the same will be done for denominational religious education (§3). Subsequently, I will argue that this latter kind of education is, even in its 'modest' critical form, hard to defend (§4). Alternatively, I argue that non-denominational *religion* education should have a fierce place in liberal education (§5). Finally, attention will be given to 'big questions' and the 'semantic potential of religion' (§5): notwithstanding the secular, scientific methodology of religion education, there is, within this kind of education, room for discussing core religious beliefs, ethical issues, and existential questions. These issues, however, need to be approached in a methodologically different way than in denominational *religious* education classes.

Liberal Education: Organization, Aims, Content, and Methodology

> Many European school systems have their roots in a religious system, in which a religious perspective, for a long time, used to be the unquestioned framework for education. These systems have become increasingly secularized, but religion itself as a subject matter seems to have been exempted from that process. (Alberts, 2019, 68)

For a very long time, education in Europe was the responsibility of the different national or local Churches (Roman-Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these education systems steadily secularized: education became the responsibility of the state, which is in charge of developing and approving curricula and teaching manuals, training and hiring teachers, and controlling the quality of education. However, even though education no longer aims at conquering 'the soul of the child', education remains value-laden and is

therefore not a 'neutral' initiative. Indeed, in liberal democratic societies, education is considered to be one of the means which can assure that all individuals have at least the opportunity "to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of one's rational advantage or good" (Rawls, 2005/1993). Education is thus in liberal democracies not value-neutral, but based on the idea that what makes human beings truly human is their *capacity for autonomy*. Whatever one's personal worldview may be, all citizens in liberal democratic states should at least have the opportunity to lead a life according to their own conception of the good life, and it is up to the state to facilitate this, amongst others by the organization of *liberal or autonomy-facilitating education*. As said by Gutmann (1999/1987, 30), "[t]he same principle that requires a state to grant adults personal and political freedom also commits it to assuring children an education that makes those freedoms both possible and meaningful in the future." In a similar vein, Levinson (1999, 144, emphasis mine) states that "[t]o educate for autonomy, is taken to be the *primary educational aim* of all schools in the liberal state."

In addition to this educational aim of providing children's "right to an open future" (Feinberg, 2007), schools also have a 'civic mission'. Since people are not born as autonomous and democratic citizens, they have to learn to become citizens, "who have a sense of justice, are law-abiding, can form critical judgments about politics, are willing to participate in civic associational life and politics (…) and can display the civic virtues of reasonableness, tolerance, and respectful deliberation with citizens embracing different viewpoints" (Boucher, 2018, 600). Hereto, 'dialogical contexts' (Callan, 1997, 117) where students can discuss with others and where they learn, through dialogue, the practice of reciprocity and reasonableness are needed. This education for citizenship is not only required "for individuals' exercise of autonomy" (Levinson, 1999, 104), but it is at the same time "a precondition for the maintenance of a healthy liberal democracy" (Levinson, 1999, 104).

If we agree that education in liberal democratic states should aim at the development of individual autonomy and foster citizenship and mutual understanding, this has its repercussions for the school curriculum. According to Levinson (1999, Ch. 5), three core aims of education are: (1) economic competitiveness; (2) democratic self-reflection; and (3)

equality of opportunity. In order to realize these aims, which are also articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC art.28 and 29), curricula should contain general information, based on the most accurate scientific and academic knowledge (e.g. geography, history, biology, chemistry, etc.). In addition, students should be able to cultivate their mental, physical, and creative capabilities (e.g. in sports; drawing lessons; music lessons); learn specific skills that are required for an active life in the future society (e.g. counting; writing; informatics; rules of politeness; basic economical skills); and become familiar with different options in society. Finally, and as an all-covering aim, students should learn to reflect in a critical way on their conception of the good life and on their future role in society.

In order to guarantee these aims of liberal education, (sub-)national governments cooperate with experts in drawing (sub-)national curricula, organizing (in) teacher training programs and designing core educational standards, sometimes supplemented with standardized tests. Inspectorates, established by the Ministry or Department of Education, are responsible for the evaluation of schools. If the required educational standards have not been met, these inspectorates can advise the Ministry or Department of Education to close one or more schools.

Religious Education: Organization, Aims, Content, and Methodology

According to the CRC (art. 29) education is, among others, directed to "the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society". At the same time (and in accordance with the UDHR (art.18) and the ECHR (art.9)), the CRC (art.14) emphasizes the "right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". In order to guarantee this right in an educational setting, most European states subsidize faith-based schools with public money. Additionally, many European member states organize and subsidize denominational religious education in governmental schools, provided a right to exemption is granted (cf. *ECtHR, Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey, Appl. No. 21163/11; EctHR, Papageorgiou and*

others v. Greece, Appl. Nos. 4762/18 and 6140/18). Remarkably, this kind of religious education is often anchored in national constitutions. In Belgium for instance, the Constitution (art.24, §1 and §3) stipulates that

> §1 […] Schools run by the public authorities offer, until the end of compulsory education, the choice between the teaching of one of the recognised religions and non-denominational ethics teaching. […]
>
> §3 […] All pupils of school age have the right to moral or religious education at the community's expense. […]

In a comparable way, the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (art.7, §2–3) reads:

> Parents and guardians shall have the right to decide whether children shall receive religious instruction.
>
> Religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools, with the exception of non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the state's right of supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned. Teachers may not be obliged against their will to give religious instruction.

Another example is art.16, §2 of the Greek Constitution, which reads as follows:

> Education constitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of Greeks, the development of national and religious consciousness and at their formation as free and responsible citizens.

A final example can be found in the Spanish Constitution (art.27, §3), which stipulates:

> The public authorities guarantee the right of parents to ensure that their children receive religious and moral instruction that is in accordance with their own convictions.

All these constitutional provisions share the same idea that *religious* education, like education in general, is a basic right: children in Belgium,

Germany, Greece, and Spain[1] do not only have a right to education directed to their full development as future citizens, but they also have a fundamental right to denominational (and therefore mainly confessional) religious education/instruction.[2]

Although religious education is often part of the regular school time, its curriculum is—different from other, 'secular' school subjects—not designed by the state, but by the respective religious communities. In the same vein, teacher training programs are not organized by the state but by religious communities, for instance at faculties of theology, at dioceses, or in (foreign) madrasahs. In order to respect the separation of church and state, the content of religious education is not controlled by the state, but by a separate religious inspectorate. Religion is, in other words,

> systematically excluded from the 'normal' curriculum that attempts to provide the pupils with a balanced and multi-faceted perspective on important issues of current societies. […]. The otherwise generally secular educational perspective on social and cultural issues in secular democracies is not applied to religion […]. (Alberts, 2019, 64)

Given this absence of state involvement and the related absence of a 'secular educational perspective', religious education classes *can* be organized in a generally critical way, but this is not always the case (cf. Alberts, 2019, 63). In the new (provisional) educational standards[3] for secondary

[1] This list is not exhaustive. Comparable ways of organizing religious education in governmental schools can be found in other European states, for example in Austria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

[2] In order to grant the *de jure* freedom of religion, moral or ethics education is also included in most constitutions and laws concerning (religious) education. In practice, however, *religious* education—and not moral or ethics education—is often the default position.

[3] At the time of writing, the implementation of these new standards is a contested issue. According to the Flemish Catholic school network, which is with about 70% of all schools in Flanders the largest provider of education in the Flemish Community, these new standards are considered too detailed and, accordingly, do not leave sufficient space for the schools' pedagogical projects—and thus for the schools' freedom of education. Therefore, a large number of Catholic schools, but also several Steiner schools, requested the Constitutional Court to suspend and annul the new standards. In June, 2016, the Constitutional Court ruled that the new standards for the second and third degree of secondary education were not in line with the freedom of religion. As a result, these new standards were to be suspended (https://www.const-court.be/public/n/2022/2022-082n-info.pdf) (access 07-07-2022).

education in the Flemish Community (Belgium) for instance, the general aims of education are captured in what is called 'key competencies'. These competencies include among others the ability to: argue in a reasonable way; differentiate facts and reality from meaning and fiction; obtain insight in the basic elements of lived organisms (including their evolution); apply scientific, technological, and mathematical concepts and methods; reflect in a critical way (e.g. about historical sources; about the role of the state); examine research problems and search for their answer(s); and make personal choices.[4]

Unfortunately, these competencies are sometimes miles away from what is to be found in religious education classes. In textbooks for Islamic religious education in the Flemish Community for instance, the content is sometimes irreconcilable with the general aims of liberal education. Although the present curriculum for Islamic religious education for secondary schools (Centrum Islamonderwijs, 2012, 15) starts with the assumption that "during the process of development of the program, scientific information and [information] based on enquiry has always been the starting point", this seems to be nothing more than lip service, as the following excerpts from the currently used textbooks (last year of secondary education, emphasis added)[5] make clear:

> If we look at our knowledge about the construction of the universe, we remark that everything, from atom to cell, from the earth we live on to the gigantic galaxy, *is maintained according to a particular planning and order*.

[4] The 16 key competencies can be found (in Dutch) at: https://www.klascement.net/thema/16-sleutelcompetenties-informatie-en-lesmateriaal?filter_enduserrole%5B%5D=11 (access 04-05-2021).

[5] These books (edited by the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs *Diyanet*) are, at present, the only available textbooks for Islamic Religious Education in Flanders (Belgium) which cover all grades in primary and secondary schools. On its website, the Centre for Islamic Education, which is responsible for this school subject, "highly recommends these books for all our (Islam)teachers in the Flemish Community". (Information online available from: https://www.centrumislamonderwijs.be/leerboeken.html [accessed 04-05-2022]). At the time of writing, a new initiative has been taken in order to develop new textbooks, which would be more critical and nuanced and which would be better adapted to the needs of Flemish Muslim students.

> Moreover, *they prove not to be without purpose*. For instance: the fact that the ozone layer filters particular harmful rays for mankind and that the earth is stocked with the materials mankind needs in order to continue his life, shows us *that the creation was created with a particular purpose*.
>
> This designates the *real fact* that the divine religions are sent by one and the same God, namely Allah.
>
> Knowledge about *the fact of resurrection*, in combination with a responsibility for [our] performed acts, has an important influence on our present life. Making this belief part of our life will lead to an increase of good deeds and a decrease of bad deeds.
>
> Islam has abolished everything that obstructs knowledge, rational thinking and freedom of expression.
>
> The prophet Muhammad has always been lovingly, merciful and tolerant in his deeds towards other people.

Needless to say, what is at stake here is *not* the development of basic knowledge and of critical thinking, but rather the contrary: it has been *asserted* that life was created by god and that there is a purpose in the cosmos (as opposed to Darwinian evolution theory, characterized by coincidence); resurrection is presented as a *fact* and not as a belief; historical evidence about Muhammad's violent acts is ignored; and Islam is wrongly represented as a religion that is nowadays characterized by openness for knowledge, critical thinking, and freedom of expression. If liberal democratic states take the aims of education seriously and care about the formation of its future citizens, this kind of uncritical religious education should not be on the regular curriculum in governmental schools.

Critical Religious Education: A Better Alternative?

Although the abovementioned example of religious education is a very recent example, it is, fortunately, not representative for all religious education classes in Belgium and abroad. Indeed, triggered by increasing secularization and religious diversity, religious education is in many European nations 'on the move' (cf. ter Avest et al., 2020): overall, there

is increasing attention for 'other' religions and worldviews and for inter-religious dialogue, and religious education no longer aims at proselytizing, but rather at identity formation.[6]

In this regard, it is noteworthy to mention that the textbooks quoted above will soon be replaced by new, critical and nuanced textbooks that are adapted to the Belgian/Flemish (school) context. In order to assure the quality of these textbooks, an interdisciplinary reflection group has been established. However, notwithstanding this as well as comparable initiatives, *religious* education still starts from an *insider's perspective*. Other religions and worldviews are thus always approached from within this perspective and not from a 'neutral', religious-studies-based perspective. This insider's perspective does, however, not imply that religious education teachers cannot be critical. A teacher of Roman Catholic religious education in Belgium, who is not only considered to be an 'expert' and a 'moderator', but also a 'witness' of the Roman Catholic faith,[7] can for instance discuss the church's official doctrine concerning homosexuality or celibacy, without doing injury to the authenticity of the Roman Catholic faith and to the related aims of Roman Catholic religious education. But can this same teacher be equally critical with regard to 'core' beliefs of this same religion, such as the holy trinity or the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Is this possible without doing injury to the authenticity of Christianity and to the aims of Roman Catholic *religious* education? Is this possible without giving up the insider's perspective?

According to Ludwig Wittgenstein (2003/1953), language use is different in different contexts and the meaning of words or statements is therefore dependent on the 'rule' or 'game' being played. Taking this into consideration, one can interpret science and religion as two different language games, which approach reality in a different way: while science is looking for an *explanation*, religion is looking for *meaning*. In a comparable vein, Stephen Jay Gould (2002/1999) considers science and religion to be two *non-overlapping magisteria* which are logically independent and of a different epistemological order. Following this approach,

[6] See for instance Franken (2021a) for a general overview and (2021b) for recent developments in Flanders (Roman-Catholic religious education) and in Germany (Protestant religious education).

[7] See for instance https://www.kerknet.be/kerknet-redactie/artikel/7-vragen-over-nieuw-leerplan--godsdienst-j%C3%BCrgen-mettepenningen (access 04-05-2022).

religious stories such as Genesis or the story of Jesus' resurrection should not be understood literally, but symbolically. It is, however, questionable whether such an approach does not, in the end, undermine the 'core' of particular religions and, by extension, the importance of the insider's perspective in religious education. What—if anything—will be left over if religious texts only have a symbolic meaning? Shouldn't we interpret at least *some* texts or passages in a literal way, in order to avoid the reduction of religion to a merely symbolic phenomenon or a human construct?

This brings us to the literal approach, which is equally problematic because of its irreconcilability with the aims and methodology of liberal education (cf. supra). After all, if religious texts are interpreted in a literal way, the question remains how religious beliefs which firmly contradict insights based on science (e.g. the creation of earth in six days; the resurrection of Jesus; the revelation of the *Qur'an*) can be reconciled with the abovementioned liberal education paradigm. Apparently, it seems impossible to solve this problem without giving up either the scientific (outsider) or the religious (insider) approach.

Religion Education as a Truly Liberal Alternative

Organizing religious education in a denominational and confessional way may lead to unresolvable tensions between this kind of religious education on the one hand and *liberal* education on the other hand. Even though a modest critical approach can also be included in confessional and denominational religious education, a stronger critical approach, wherein religious texts are merely seen as symbolic, is less evident. Moreover, as the textbook example of Islamic religious education in Flanders makes clear, even a modest critical approach is not always guaranteed in practice.

However, the mere fact that some religious claims are, if taken literally, irreconcilable with liberal education does not imply that we should entirely exclude 'religion' from school. After all, there is, in a liberal educational setting, no problem if all students learn, in a critical and

objective way, about religion (*ECtHR, Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v. Denmark, Appl. no. 5095/71; 5920/72; 5926/72; ECtHR, Folgerø and others v. Norway, Appl. no. 15472/02*). The problem is, however, that this critical and objective stance is often absent in schools. Once religion is at stake, this impartial perspective has been exchanged for a partial and therefore often less critical insider's perspective. In Germany for instance,

> the position of one particular religious community that has the right to organize that particular way of RE is the one and only perspective that one gets on one's own religion during one's own school life. This may be in a generally critical way, but this is not a necessity. Given the fact that teachers for confessional RE have been trained merely in the confessional perspective of their own religion, issues like the role of religion and the state, etc., are never studied from a critical outsider perspective but from the perspective of a religious body who has the power to train teachers and offer RE in school (i.e. a privilege that a large number of religious communities do not have). That particular perspective on religion is not questioned anywhere in school, but is generally taken as sufficient framework for communicating knowledge about religion. (Alberts, 2019, 63)

That being said, we should not throw the baby with the bathwater. While the inclusion of *religious* education in the regular school curriculum may lead to what Alberts (2019) calls 'small i indoctrination', the exclusion of *religion* education—that is education about diverse religious and non-religious worldviews, based on the academic study of religion—may in a comparable way lead to what Nord (2010, 5, 87) calls *secular indoctrination*. In order to be truly 'liberal', governmental schools should neither promote religion (by organizing *religious* education classes as the default position), nor should they promote secularism (by abstaining from any kind of education about religion). Alternatively, all students should be able to learn, in a critical and objective way, about the phenomenon of religion. Hereto,

> RE must be emancipated from theology and religious interests and be the responsibility of educational authorities. Well-educated teachers, who, in addition to their pedagogical and educational expertise, are educated in the academic study of religion, should teach the subject. (Kjeldsen, 2019, 15)

Different from *religious* education, *religion* education is not organized by religious communities but by the state. Teachers are not supposed to 'witness' from their own religion and to study at theological faculties or departments. Alternatively, they are trained in the academic study of religion and their own religious affiliation should not be an issue: what matters in the classroom are the teachers' academic and pedagogical skills, not their (non-)religious affiliation. In line with this, religion education does not aim at socialization in a particular religious tradition, but at socializing students in the broader, liberal-democratic society which is characterized by reasonable pluralism. Particular religious traditions are therefore not portrayed as 'true' or 'authentic', but different religious and non-religious worldviews are, in a critical and comparative way, presented as different life options, without prioritizing one of these options. Or, in the words of Nord,

> [t]here are many reasons for taking religion seriously in public schools and universities. A liberal education requires it. Because religion continues to be such an influential force for good and for evil one simply can't be an educated person without understanding a fair amount about it. Even more important, because we disagree so deeply about the merits of various religious and secular ways of making sense of the world and our lives, students must be introduced to the religious as well as the secular alternatives if they are to think critically.

Like for instance history and literature, religion education can contribute to the students' *Allgemeinbildung* (cf. Jensen, 2011, 137; 2019, 34) and, more specific, to what Stephen Protero (2008) calls *religious literacy*. Many citizens lack correct and non-stereotypical knowledge of religions, which can lead to intolerant attitudes and difficulties in respecting other beliefs, practices and rituals. One of the aims of *religion* education is therefore to inform pupils about religious and non-religious worldviews, to reduce the prejudices against (adherents of) other religions and to develop a respectful and tolerant attitude towards cultural and religious differences. Moreover, if we expect students to understand our own culture and history, religion education is also important: diverse worldviews and philosophical theories and insights are significant, because they have

shaped our society and our way of thinking. We therefore agree with Jensen (2008, 130) when he writes:

> Religion, one way or the other, is and has always been a more or less important part of human life and world history, of social, political and cultural formations and discourses. Scientifically grounded knowledge of humankind, of cultural, social and cognitive constructs and mechanisms, of the history and evolution of man and culture, etc., all imply and necessitate studies and knowledge of what is called religion. Of religion in general, of various religious traditions and phenomena, and of the various ways religion and religions interact with and influence other human, social and cultural formations and discourses.

Religion education also deals with the fact that a substantial number of the younger generation are still interested in religions and worldviews. Although our society is characterized by a decline of institutionalized religion, many people are still interested in the 'big questions' of life. Neglecting this would not only be an educational but also an existential and intellectual deficit (cf. infra).

If organized in an impartial and academically embedded way, *religion* education can also foster

> the developing of the pupils' analytical and critical thinking competencies and knowledge. This includes the ability to analyse, discuss, and explain religious and non-religious discourses on religion(s) and examine religious diversity in relation to social and historical developments, power, politics, social conflicts, and other factors. (Kjeldsen, 2019, 16)

In order to reach these analytical and critical skills (which are common in liberal education programs), religions should not be studied as true or false comprehensive doctrines, but as "human-socially and culturally constructed, negotiated and changing phenomena" (Kjeldsen, 2019, 15–16). Hereto, an *outsider perspective* is required. This secular study of religion

> chooses to interpret, understand and explain religion in non-religious terms. It confines itself to analytical models grounded in a view of the

> world based on the insights and achievements of the natural sciences. The study of religion, obviously, is not a natural science. It applies methods, theories and models developed in the human and social sciences: history, sociology, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, ethnography and philosophy. It is further characterized by a comparative interest in all religions throughout human history. But its view of the world is secular and humanistic. (Geertz, 2000, 11)

As pointed above, this has implications for some core religious beliefs, in particular when they oppose secular science. If the secular study of religion is taken seriously, teachers in religion education must, like all teachers, respect the "boundary conditions established by the methodologies and substantiated knowledge of the natural and social sciences" (Wiebe, 2016, 192), on which the liberal education paradigm is founded. However, since science cannot explain everything (e.g. what was 'out there' before the big bang? What is the meaning of life? What is good and what is bad?), teachers should be aware of the limits of the scientific paradigm. At this point, the methodological stance of agnosticism could be helpful: as argued by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1781/1999), knowledge is restricted to the *phenomenal world*, which is structured by time and space. Given the limitations of the human brain, it is impossible to do pronunciations with the same epistemic (scientific) value about what (if anything) lies beyond time and space—the so-called *noumenal world*. Therefore, a stance of *methodological agnosticism* is recommended here. However, while this stance makes sense where the current limits of science are reached, this stance should not be applied *if there is sufficient scientific evidence for a particular theory* (e.g. the evolution of mankind; the impossibility of resurrection), even if this theory opposes (core) religious beliefs. At this point, religion education teachers should, like teachers of other secular school subjects, make clear that scientifically proven theories are the best provisional theories, even if they sometimes oppose religious 'explanations' and core religious beliefs. This is what Jensen (2019, 36) labels as the 'religion-critical', but therefore not necessarily anti-religious or atheistic, approach.

Big Questions, Ethics and the Semantic Potential of Religion

Critics may argue that the abovementioned scientific—and thus critical—approach rejects our true human existence. After all, human beings are not only looking for explanations, but also for *meaning* and a merely objective, scientific study of religion neglects these 'big questions'. However, even though the current answers to 'big questions' fall behind the scope of the natural and social sciences, this by no means implies that they should be excluded from *religion* education classes. Different from *religious* education, however, these questions should not be discussed from within one—religious or atheist—perspective, but they should be "approached from a more distanced perspective than in the case of the different life-world approaches" (Kjeldsen, 2019, 20).

With regard to ethics education, it is also important to underline the difference between 'thin' or 'political liberal' moral views on the one hand, and different 'thick' or 'comprehensive' moral views, on the other hand. While the former can, in Rawlsian terms, be accepted by all 'reasonable and rational' citizens and form the normative basis of our liberal democratic societies, the latter (which are often part of confessional and denominational religious education) are not necessarily accepted by all 'reasonable and rational' citizens (Rawls, 2005/1993, 78, 175, 217) and should therefore not be approached in the same normative way as the former. In a similar way, van der Kooij et al. (2015) make a distinction between 'narrow' and 'broad' morality. The former "focuses on the basic rules and principles that make it possible for human beings to live and work together" and is thus "about duties and obligations to others". The latter, by contrast, "focuses on living a flourishing life and surpasses moral rules necessary to live together" (van der Kooij et al., 2015, p. 83). Broad morality is thus connected with "someone's most important aims in life" (van der Kooij et al., 2015, p. 83) and is related to personal and/or institutional worldviews, which is not necessarily the case for narrow morality. In *religion* education classes, attention should therefore be given to both kinds of morality, but from a different perspective: while the ('narrow') political liberal paradigm should be taught as the default position

that is required to live together in liberal democratic societies, different 'broad'—probably religiously inspired—ethical positions should not be taught as equivalent default positions, but as different ethical possibilities, which can in a best case scenario be reconciled with the political liberal paradigm.

Finally, a few words about what Jürgen Habermas calls the *semantic potential* of religion. Even though teachers of religion education are required to reject the *literal* interpretation of for instance Genesis because this opposes scientific evidence, this by no means that this story should have no place in the classroom—rather the contrary. As argued by Habermas (2006; see also Carr, 2007), religious stories and traditions have "a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life" (Habermas, 2006, 10), which cannot be found in a comparable way in the secular, scientific discourse. Without believing that for instance the story of Genesis is true, one can understand the moral and existential message of this story and, accordingly, students can learn something from this religious text (cf. Habermas, 2002, 73–74). In the words of David Carr (2007, 669): "the truth of evolutionary theory need not invalidate Genesis. It remains a distinct possibility that both Genesis and evolutionary theory have something to contribute to human understanding of the world and our place in it." In all probability, one of the most challenging tasks of the religion education teacher today is to make students aware of this semantic potential and of the *big questions* in life, without favoring one particular religious or non-religious worldview.

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9

Subject-specific Core Knowledge and Skills in the Academic Study of Religion(s) and Religious Education in Theory and Practice

Karna Kjeldsen

Introduction

What knowledge and skills, *how* to teach and learn and *why* are central questions in discussions on the school system and school subjects. Answers to these questions relate to different understandings of the main role of the school. Should the school mainly *socialise* pupils into traditional cultural knowledge and values, *qualify* them for further education and future jobs, aim at *personal formation/development* and/or enable the future generation to *critically analyse*, understand, challenge and even change existing values, ideologies, social interests and structures of power (Young, 2008)? When it comes to religious education (RE) in the school system, questions about knowledge, skills and aims are complicated even

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further. RE comes in very different forms, depending on state–religion relations and varied political, ideological and religious interests, and often becomes part of cultural battles and politics on security, migration and integration (Jensen, 2013). In addition, there is no agreement on what the basis or reference academic disciplines for RE and subject-specific pedagogic and didactical research are or should be. As argued by Wanda Alberts (2019), the lines are therefore blurred between theology and the study of religions, secular and interreligious/religious approaches and the categories learning *about*, learning *from* and *education into* religion, which are often used in discussion of the overall aims and function of RE.

I take as a starting point that RE can and ought to be based on key principles, theories, methods and knowledge developed in the study of religions. Hence, account must be taken of scientific 'turns', critique of concepts such as 'religion' and the 'world religions paradigm' and new theoretical–methodological developments and reflections on how to reconstruct a critical study of religions. Various scholars of religions and RE have undertaken critical research on RE including ideas about RE contributing to extra-academic aims. Based on this research, they have argued that a study of religions-based RE is legitimate and needed in pluralistic and democratic societies and have formulated an overall framework for this kind of RE (e.g., Alberts, 2007; Andreassen, 2016; Frank, 2013; Jensen, 2011, 2019; Kjeldsen, 2019a, 2019b).

In this chapter, I analyse and discuss more specifically *what* may constitute the core subject-specific general knowledge, skills, conceptual knowledge and content areas of the study of religions and RE in theory and practice, using Denmark as a case study. The first part identifies subject-specific knowledge and skills in the study of religions as an academic discipline derived from readings of key publications on theoretical and methodological issues and a comparative analysis of study of religions programmes offered by university departments in Denmark. The second part explores how the identified central knowledge and skills differ from or resemble those covered by the national curriculum and some of the most popular RE material used in the primary school (1–9 grade level) in Denmark. Finally, I discuss some of the challenges to implementing subject-based core knowledge and skills based on the (critical) study of religions in RE in schools and discuss whether it is possible to identify and legitimise such core knowledge and skills in the first place.

Knowledge, Skills, Competences, Bildung: What Do We Talk About?

The main role of schools and education is to provide pupils and students with knowledge and skills. Knowledge often refers to a theoretical or practical understanding, familiarity or awareness of something or someone acquired through education or experience. It can be systematic/general or particular/specific, and it can take various forms, such as factual and procedural (skills). Schools are also expected to contribute to some kind of personal and social development/formation—in a Northern European context referred to as 'Bildung' (Danish: *dannelse*). In Denmark, there has been a strong tradition of seeing 'Bildung' as the main aim of the school and as something different from academic and subject-specific knowledge and skills (Schnack, 2011, pp. 34–35). This thinking is influenced by the theologians N.F.S. Grundvig and K.E. Løgstrup and their ideas about 'enlightenment of life' (Danish: *livsoplysning*) or 'enlightenment of existence' (Danish: *tilværelsesoplysning*) being the main aim of schools—ideas which have gone hand in hand with child-centred progressive pedagogy (Gjerløff & Jacobsen, 2014).

Since the end of the 1990s, schools and education systems in Europe have undergone various reforms to meet changes in society. The politics of education has been dominated by what Michael Young (2008) calls a technical–instrumentalist politics of education, but also a revival of 'neoconservative traditionalism'. The latter wants to hold on to the idea that schools should transmit to and socialise pupils into a specific majority culture, history and dominant values, often postulated to be intimately linked to the majority religion. The technical–instrumentalist strategy is part of the development of societies into 'competition states' (Pedersen, 2011), in which schools and education are ascribed an important role in qualifying future citizens to contribute to the economic growth of the country and to solve various kinds of political, social and environmental challenges. These strategies have resulted in a focus on learning (instead of teaching), assessment, twenty-first-century skills and competencies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018) and citizenship education (Council of Europe, 2016). The OECD argues that individuals need a wide range of competencies to face the

complex challenges of today's world and defines the concept of competence as 'the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context' (OECD, 2005, p. 4). Scholars from various fields have been critical of these developments in the politics of education. Some point out that competencies, knowledge, skills and/or 'Bildung' are often separated from subject-specific knowledge, skills and content and become too general and abstract (von Oettingen, 2016; Willbergh, 2015).

Recently, the concept of 'religious literacy', originating in a North American and British context, has entered the field of RE more broadly. While this concept might be seen as a new way to specify subject-specific knowledge, skills and aims in RE, it is used and understood in different ways, often closely related to existing approaches to RE. Religious literacy can mean doctrinal, narrative and historical knowledge about one or more religions in order to understand and live in a given society (Prothero, 2007). It can mean study of religions-based knowledge and analytical skills needed to be able to 'discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses' (Moore, 2007, pp. 56–57) and/or something that includes how this affects one's own sense of self and relationship to religion(s) (see, e.g., Marcus & Ralph, 2021, for an overview). Thus, similar to the concept of 'competence', religious literacy must be broken into specific areas of knowledge and skills (and aims) in order to clarify what it actually means.

In order to identify and analyse *what* may constitute the core subject-specific general knowledge and skills in the study of religions and RE, I use categories inspired by various scholars of education and didactics (Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Young, 2013). The first category (1) *subject-specific general knowledge* refers to important general knowledge about the subject's field, for example *knowing that* 'religions' and specific terms such as 'Buddhism' are human constructions covering a wide range of different human, social and cultural ideas and practices from various historical and geographical contexts. (2) *Subject-specific skills* are *knowing how* to study the subject's field from an academic perspective. The subject-specific skills are closely linked to (3) *subject-specific conceptual knowledge* about theories, methods and concepts pertaining to the academic discipline, in this

case the study of religions, including the criticism of theories and concepts. (4) *Subject-specific content knowledge* refers to knowledge about particular content areas depending on the educational, social and geographical contexts.

Subject-specific General Knowledge and Skills in the Academic Study of Religions

Like other scientific disciplines, the academic study of religion(s) has been marked by linguistic, cultural and social 'turns' and been subject to post-colonial, post-modernist and feminist criticism (e.g., Geertz & McCutcheon, 2000; Jensen, 2003). In particular, there has been much critique of the concepts 'religion' and 'world religions' and the political, social and economic consequences of these discourses, as well as of the dominance of the so-called world religions paradigm in the study of religions and RE (King, 1999; Masuzawa, 2005; McCutcheon, 2015; Owen, 2011). The widespread critique has given rise to theoretical developments and efforts to deconstruct and reconstruct the study of religions (e.g., Antes et al., 2004; Cotter & Robertson, 2016). While most scholars of religion agree on many insights from critiques, whether made inside or outside the academic study of religions, they do not agree entirely about what consequences these insights should have for the study of religions as an academic discipline. Some argue that the concepts of religion, world religions and religions as entities, such as Buddhism, should be abolished altogether and are critical towards the possibility of the academic study of religions as a (separate) scientific discipline (Fitzgerald, 2000; Martin & Wiebe, 2012; Wiebe, 1984). More scholars, however, are actively engaged in developing and reconstructing a scientific theoretical and epistemological basis for the study of religions in which empirical studies, theories, methods, generalisation, comparison and explanation are fundamental. The cognitive science of religion and a focus on semantic, rhetorical and communicative aspects of religion have supported these developments (e.g., Boyer, 2001; Geertz, 2000; Jensen, 2019; S. Jensen, 2003, 2014; Joy, 2016; Martin, 2016).

Recent publications taking a critical approach to the study of religions have suggested ways to deconstruct religion(s) into various elements and reframe concepts relevant to the study of religions (e.g., Hughes & McCutcheon, 2022; Martin, 2012). Developments also include social theories on how religious ideas, practices and institutions are part of social formations and the way people construct and reproduce hierarchical structures, authority, power and social roles (e.g., Mack, 2008). In general, attention has been paid to the processes whereby people ascribe special characteristics or meanings to various ideas, practices and discourses with reference to some supra-natural elements (Taves, 2011). In addition, much research has focused on the differences between unofficial and official religion, lived religion, everyday religion, gender aspects, elite versus 'ordinary' people (e.g., Ammerman, 2007) and the importance of body and materiality (e.g., Morgan, 2010).[1] To sum up all these developments, insights and critiques is beyond the focus of this chapter. Here, I try to identify the core *subject-specific general knowledge* and *skills* that seem to be widely accepted in the (critical) study of religions and are relevant to RE.

Central *subject-specific skills* in the study of religion (and RE) are *knowing how* to collect data and analyse, interpret, understand, compare and explain religion(s) as human cognitive, social and diverse phenomena from a non-religious perspective using methods, theories and models in the human, social and natural sciences (Geertz, 2000). These skills require *subject-specific conceptual knowledge* about theories, methods and concepts, including the ability to critically reflect on and discuss these and their history and (as students and scholars) take part in ongoing theoretical and methodological development. Some important elements within s*ubject-specific general knowledge* in the study of religion are *knowing that*:

– 'Religion' and 'religions' are theory-dependent concepts, which cannot be directly correlated with facts or entities in the world. What scholars

[1] Material religion, lived religion and so on are also streams of thought in other kinds of studies on religion. In some forms these streams are criticised for ending up with the same problems as the classical or hermeneutic–existential phenomenology of religion, seeing 'religious expressions' as something that originate in pre-linguistic, pre-social and pre-historic 'religious feelings' or 'religious experiences' (McCutcheon, 2016).

(and people in general) categorise as or connect with these concepts are integrated aspects in the social and cultural sphere. It is part of how people construct, organise, classify and transmit social and cultural 'worlds' or systems and how they act, think and ascribe meaning to the world. This human enterprise includes and relates to many 'things' or areas, such as rituals, myths, institutions, buildings, material objects, special places, social categories, economics, politics, conflicts, celebrations, dress and hairstyle, food, body ornament, practices and sexuality, and all these elements can be scientifically studied (Jensen, 2014; Mack, 2000).

– Terms such as 'Christianity', 'Hinduism', 'Islam' and 'religious traditions' are constructed categories imposed on or used as terms for a wide range of human social and cultural ideas, practices, products and systems from various historical and geographical contexts. Efforts to identify a specific authentic, timeless and core essence in specific cultures or religions are related to political, ideological and/or religious interests (whether used critically or apologetically) and must be studied as such.
– 'Official' dogmatic teaching, ideas and rituals transmitted by institutions, the religious elite and in authoritative texts are the results of processes of negotiations, battles and developments in specific times and places often related to issues of power, resources, authority and so on. To study something from a study of religions perspective means to demystify what looks 'natural' or 'goes without saying' (Martin, 2012). Or, in the words of Bruce Lincoln, to 'insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices, and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine' (Lincoln, 2000, p. 119).
– Religious practices, ideas, values, norms and so on are social and cultural forces, which can be imposed on people and internalised. However, cognitive research shows that people do not have a coherent 'system of belief' or 'worldview', but, in fact, have contradictory and theologically incorrect ideas and beliefs, and that people's behaviour is often based on something other than religious 'beliefs' (Boyer, 2001; Martin, 2012; Jensen, 2014).

– People think, act, change, combine, transmit and discuss religious ideas and practices in many different ways across age, gender, religious commitment and social, cultural, historical and geographical contexts. This might differ from, challenge and change the official religion of the religious communities/traditions with which people identify (Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2008).
– While there are many differences in the way people, groups and institutions act, live and think religion(s), there are also similarities or universals when it comes to, for example, form, function, structure and meaning, and it is thus possible to compare features of religion(s) across time and place (Jensen, 2014). There are different levels of comparison and explanation. Specific similarities between some (but not all) religious ideas, narratives, practices and organisation can be the results of direct or indirect historical relationships, cultural evolution, language families and so on. General similarities or universals can be caused by how human brains work and similarities in how humans make and structure social worlds (Pedersen & Sørensen, 2016).

Subject-specific Skills, Conceptual Knowledge and Content Knowledge in Study of Religions Programmes at Danish Universities

Study of religions programmes at universities can, in practice, vary greatly depending on social, political, educational and institutional contexts. The academic study of religions in the Nordic countries have different contexts, developments and contemporary profiles to, *inter alia*, religious studies in North America, which forms the basis of some of the most radical critiques of the study of religions as an academic discipline. In Denmark, three university departments offer the study of religions (Aarhus, Odense and Copenhagen), all with BA and MA programmes. Their profiles differ to some degree, but there are also many similarities. In their historical presentation of the academic study of religions in Denmark, Tim Jensen and Armin W. Geertz write that (2014, p. 79):

> Today it may be claimed that a kind of balance has been achieved whereby historical and empirical studies of religions go hand in hand with theoretical and methodological reflections, and where a balance between, on the one hand, more classical comparative history of religions materials and approaches, and, on the other hand, new and different areas of research, and new and different approaches and theories are of equal importance.

Besides having the *subject-specific general* and *conceptual knowledge* and *skills* mentioned above as a basis and contributing to general educational competences, the overall subject-specific conceptual knowledge, skills and content knowledge (with small variations) in the three BA-level programmes offered in 2022 can be summed up as follows.

Subject-specific Conceptual Knowledge

- Theories, methods, concepts and general discussions in the study of religions, for example from the comparative history of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion and philosophy.
- The history of the study of religions as a scientific discipline.

Subject-specific Skills (Know How to)

- Critically analyse, compare and discuss different sources, information and cases from and about religions in their cultural, historical and social contexts and religious-related topics using relevant theories and methods.
- Find sources and academic knowledge about different themes and topics.
- Critically reflect on theories, issues and discussions pertaining to the study of religions.
- Critically analyse issues and public discussions about religion and culture using relevant theories, methods and knowledge.
- Analyse, read and discuss sources in their original language.
- Communicate to others in different contexts about discussions, issues, themes, theories and knowledge in a study of religions perspective.

Subject-specific Content Knowledge

- Study of religions-based knowledge (comparative, sociological, historical) of 'religion', various religions and religious phenomena and communication on religion(s) in relation to political, cultural and social contexts and issues past and present.
- Odense: Philosophy relevant for the study of religions and knowledge about RE from a study of religions perspective.
- Aarhus: Ethics and philosophy of religion-related issues and concerns in relation to secularisation and modernity.
- Copenhagen: Religious expressions in texts, visual form, practice, organisation and communication (University of Southern Denmark, 2022; Aarhus University, 2018; University of Copenhagen, 2019).

What this kind of *subject-specific content knowledge* includes, more specifically, varies over time and place. The three study programmes are not based in the world religions paradigm but, due to their obligation to also function as an educational basis for RE teachers in upper secondary schools, they must include Christianity, Islam and another contemporary (major) religion. However, there are many other obligatory and elective courses dealing with a range of different forms of religions and spiritual streams, themes and (critical) theoretical and methodological discussions. Some of the obligatory courses at BA level cover areas such as theories and methods, philosophy, comparative history of religion and phenomenology, indigenous religions, ancient religions, religious and spiritual innovation, popular and alternative forms of religion, representation and the communication and teaching of religion(s) in various contexts.

Subject-specific Core Knowledge and Skills in RE in Practice: National Curriculum

Most of the above *subject-specific skills*, *general knowledge*, *conceptual knowledge* and suggested content areas are, in principle, relevant for RE in the primary and upper secondary school and can be pedagogically and didactically adapted to fit various age groups and contexts. When it

comes to RE in practice, however, questions regarding knowledge and skills are often not based (solely) on academic, pedagogical and didactical grounds, but heavily influenced by political, ideological and/or religious interests and other academic and pedagogic traditions.

Non-confessional RE in the primary school in Denmark is a good example. In contrast to RE in the upper secondary school (*Gymnasium*), this school subject does not take the study of religion as a basic discipline. Rather, it has been (and still is) dominated by theologically based approaches to religion and RE and national–cultural political strategies. The overall aim, competencies aims and content areas have been almost unchanged for more than 30 years, although some developments have taken place in the suggested syllabus (*læseplan*) and guidelines. The overall profile is a life-philosophical–existential approach based on what can be called Christian theological hermeneutic–existential approaches to religion (Jensen, 2003) and a national–cultural Christian approach centred on biblical narratives and evangelical Lutheran Christianity. The *central content knowledge* is specified in the overall Education Act, which states that the core field of knowledge must be the Christianity of the established (evangelical Lutheran) church and that 'foreign religions and views of life' are to be included during Grades 7–9 (Undervisningsministeriet (UVM), 2021). Thus, there are no aims for religions other than Christianity until Grades 7–9, although most teachers and textbooks do address some other religions before this stage. The content areas are life-philosophy and ethics (life-philosophy, ethics, 'choices of belief' and 'interpretations of life'), biblical stories (the Bible, narratives and interpretations of life, narratives and culture), Christianity (history, central ideas and expressions) and non-Christian religions and views on life (central aspects, central ideas and appearances) (UVM, 2019). The overall aim of RE is that pupils:

> can understand and address the impact of the religious dimension on individuals' view of life (*livsopfattelsen*) and its relationship to other people;
>
> achieve knowledge of Christianity in a historical and contemporary context as well as of biblical stories and their importance for the foundational values of our culture (*kulturkreds*). In addition, pupils in Grades 7–9 are to acquire knowledge of other religions and life views (*livsanskuelser*). (UVM, 2019, p. 7, my translation)

Life philosophy and ethics are to be the overall didactical approach, centred on a concept called 'the religious dimension'. This concept is heavily (but implicitly) inspired by the Christian theologian Paul Tillich's concept of religion and Michael Grimmitt's Tillich-inspired approach to RE:

> The religious dimension means that all pupils ask questions about their lives. In RE, a human being is seen as a being who seeks meaning in life, and it is this search for the foundation of life (*tilværelsen*) which is defined as the religious dimension.
>
> The central aim of RE is to qualify pupils to discuss and reflect on the basic conditions of life and questions about what it means to be human. Religions and other life views are constituted by these questions and represent different answers. (UVM, 2019, p. 25)

The idea that the pupils should also learn *from* religion (read: Christianity/the Bible) was explicitly formulated in earlier curricula and can still be found to some extent: 'The biblical stories contain a worldview (*livssyn*), view on humans and understanding of life, which give pupils the opportunity to understand and realise the limits of human life, beginning and end, love and evil, despair and hope' (UVM, 2019, p. 33, my translation).

The life-philosophical and national–cultural Christian profile influences what is seen as the core *subject-specific knowledge and skills*. After Grade 9, pupils are expected to be able to:

- relate to (or take a stance in relation to) the content and meaning of the religious dimension with a focus on questions of life and ethical principles;
- interpret basic values derived from biblical stories;
- relate to (or take a stance in relation to) central aspects of the history of Christianity and the impact of the established church in Denmark; and
- relate to (or take a stance in relation to) central ideas and issues (or problems) in the major world religions and views of life, both in the past and now.

There is no mention of *subject-specific general knowledge* about religion, religions, life views and so on as diverse human and socially and culturally constructed phenomena. As argued elsewhere (Kjeldsen, 2019b), the aims do not focus on *conceptual knowledge*, for example deconstruction or thematicisation of the concept of religion apart from gaining knowledge about concepts in Christianity and non-Christian religions. Nor do the aims state that pupils should be able to develop analytical–critical skills to analyse, contextualise, compare or explain insider or outsider sources and communication about religion(s). Based on research, scholars of RE have criticised the Christian-based life–philosophical approach; the lack of knowledge and skills; and the qualitative difference between Christianity and other religions in the official profile, learning material and intended teaching (e.g. Böwadt, 2007; Jensen, 1994; Jensen & Kjeldsen, 2013; Kjeldsen, 2016, 2019a). The suggested syllabus from 2019 has made some changes, inter alia mentions that the teaching should include insider and outsider perspectives, the latter by describing religion and religions as historical and social phenomena using 'subject-specific language', and that the historical–critical approach is central (UVM, 2019, pp. 25–26). However, the syllabus does not specify whether this subject-specific language should be based in the academic study of religions, theology or other academic disciplines.

Subject-specific Core Knowledge and Skills in Practice: Learning Material for RE

The official profile of RE is to a large degree reflected in the most used learning material for RE and in the intended teaching in many schools (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2019a). In the following, I give examples of what kind of knowledge and skills are in focus in the widely used digital platform *Clio online* for Grades 1–3, 4–6 and 7/8–9 and in the textbook system *Liv og Religion* used in Grades 3, 6 and 9. *Clio Online* is one of three digital learning platforms with 'ready to use' material for pupils. The use of these platforms is increasing, not least because many municipalities buy access to one of them, and because the time for preparing teaching has

been heavily reduced. *Clio Online* consists of different themes divided into 'pages' (a page consists of a very short text and some activities) and some pages are combined to thematic lesson plans. There is little guidance for teachers about aims and organisation and no background knowledge. The pages have different authors, and some of the pages (but not the related activities or aims) on 'other religions' are now authored by scholars of religion. *Liv og Religion* is an analogue textbook system consisting of books for the children and a comprehensive teacher's guide. It is written by board members and the head of the RE teachers' association. According to research and sales numbers, it has been by far the most frequently used system in schools for many years, including as a basis for the structure of the teaching (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2019a).

Grades 1–3: Life Philosophy and Biblical Stories

The *central content knowledge* in Grades 1–3 in *Liv og religion* and *Clio Online* consists of life-philosophical themes and biblical stories, supplemented with themes on official rituals and festivals in the established church, the history of Christianity and a little on 'other religions', with a focus on practice. In *Clio Online*[2] the life-philosophical themes, biblical stories and dogmatic teaching in Christianity are closely combined and related to the life-world of the pupils. All the pages and lessons-plans on 'life' are structured in the same way. First, a short text introduces the theme, such as 'friends', 'forgiveness' or 'love', which is related to the life-worlds of the pupils. This is followed by a section entitled 'what does the Bible say?' with short explanations of what Jesus said about being friends, forgiveness and so on. Then, the pupils undertake various activities, such as games or drama, or talk about the life-philosophical issues. The aim, whether implicit or explicit, is that the pupils should learn *from* the message inherent in what Jesus said. The pages and lesson-plans on 'preaching' in the established church are also structured in this way. In contrast, when it comes to 'other religions' (Islam, Judaism), the content is not

[2] https://portals.clio.me/dk/religion/1-3/.

related to life-philosophical questions or the life-world of the pupils and mainly consists of factual knowledge. The religions are implicitly represented as 'religions as entities' and reflect the world religions paradigm. There is no mention of diversity, contextual and historical features and developments or lived religion. Thus, there are huge differences in how the material represents and approaches Biblical stories and evangelical Lutheran Christianity and 'other religions'. As in the national curriculum, there is no focus on *subject-specific analytical* skills or *specific general knowledge* about religion(s). Most of the activities, questions and tasks are dialogues, factual questions, drama, games and creative activities. Even though the pupils are asked to compare, they are not given any framework for doing so—they are simply asked to compare Judaism with Christianity or the Torah with the Bible. The material presents the pupils with some central concepts from the different religions, but there is no *conceptual knowledge* in terms of simplified theories, methods or concepts from the study of religion.

Liv og Religion explicitly follows the life-philosophical approach. According to the authors, this is the only approach which lives up to what they see as the most important aim of the school, namely the personal 'Bildung' of the pupils. In their opinion, RE is about asking questions and generating different answers, which the pupils can learn *from* (Mortensen et al., 2008). In Grade 3 (Mortensen et al., 2002), the main *content knowledge* is life-philosophical themes, biblical stories and Christianity. There is very little on 'other religions'. As in the case of *Clio*, the biblical stories are often used as a point of departure for life-philosophical/ethical discussions. The content knowledge about (Protestant) Christianity is primarily theologically based and often uses insider language in the textbook and teacher's guide, while a more distanced language is used when dealing with other forms of Christianity and other religions. The pupils are not presented with other *conceptual knowledge* and do not learn (in a simplified way) how to use this. The tasks and activities are mainly creative (drawing), drama, talks and questions about how to relate biblical stories to their own life and discussions in which the pupils express their own opinion.

Grades 4–6: Life Philosophy, Biblical Stories and a Little More on 'Other Religions'

Clio online[3] for Grades 4–6 and 7–8 consists of almost the same pages and lesson plans. In Grades 4–6, the suggested lesson plans only include very brief introductions to Judaism and Islam which are represented at the official level as 'religions as entities'. It is mainly Christianity ('Biblical Stories'), which is part of the life-philosophical themes. One example is the theme 'what it means to be human', which includes the story of the Good Samaritan and requires the pupils to express their view on how the 'messages' of this or the dogma on love in Christianity are relevant for them and for people in general. The pupils are not required to acquire *conceptual knowledge* or *analytical skills* in terms of learning about and trying to use concepts, theories and methods.

In *Liv og religion 6* (Mortensen et al., 2006) Christianity still constitutes the main *content knowledge*, centred on dogmatic teaching in an (implicitly) evangelical Lutheran perspective, often presented as unique compared to religions. The chapter on love, for example, aims at making the pupils aware of how love has a special grounding and status in Christianity and encouraging them to learn *from* the Christian concept of love in terms of recognising and loving others and reflecting on their own values. In contrast, the pupils should gain knowledge about other alternative religions in order to enable them to deal critically with this 'supermarket' of alternative forms. There is some *content knowledge* on other religions with a focus on practice. The pupils are also presented with some *conceptual knowledge* in terms of the concepts of belief, prayer and sacrifice, often explained in the teacher's guide using an implicitly Christian theological perspective. However, there are no tasks or activities in which the pupils are required to use this conceptual knowledge or other theories or methods. Some activities and tasks are knowledge-based or about facts and many are life-philosophical tasks in which the pupils are required to critically express their opinion about different matters.

[3] https://portals.clio.me/dk/religion/4-6/.

Grade 7/8–9: Socio-cultural/Ethical Issues

At Grade 7/8–9, the *content knowledge* becomes more diverse and reflects the fact that the pupils might have to sit a final exam and that other religions and life-views are to be included according to the national curriculum. Much of the content knowledge focuses on socio-cultural and ethical issues. The pages in *Clio Online*[4] include an introduction to Hinduism, Buddhism, new religions, 'other faith traditions' and themes in which some of the religions are related to socio-political-cultural issues. In most of the activities and aims, the pupils are required to discuss their own and others' opinions on various themes. With only one exception in a lesson plan on 'new religions', the pupils are not presented with or required to learn how to use *conceptual knowledge* even at this level.

Liv og Religion 9 (Mortensen et al., 2008) is structured around themes. Some of them are based on the life-philosophical approach, such as 'what is suffering', while others are socio-cultural or social-ethical themes. Christianity is still the main *content knowledge*, especially in the life-philosophical themes, while other religions are mostly included in the socio-cultural and ethical themes. In general, pupils are presented with more diversity in religions. There is also more focus on *conceptual knowledge* in terms of concepts such as religiosity, sacredness, however often explained in a Christian-based hermeneutic-existential perspective. While the pupils are presented with *conceptual knowledge* from social science about 'culture' and shall use these theories in their analysis of 'cultural meetings', the textbook does not include *conceptual knowledge* and *subject-specific analytical skills* based in the study of religions.

[4] https://portals.clio.me/dk/religion/7-10/.

Concluding Discussion: The Challenge of Subject-specific Knowledge and Skills Based on the Study of Religions in RE, and Is There a 'What'?

Although RE across Europe are in the process of developing from primarily 'mono-religious' confessional or non-confessional subjects towards including some knowledge of 'other religions and life-views', in many countries it continues to be framed by religious, political and ideological interests and dominated by religious—especially Christian—approaches to religion and teaching about religion(s) (Andreassen, 2014; Alberts, 2019). Moreover, it continues to be a strong and influential ideology that RE, especially in the primary school, should focus first and foremost on extra-academic aims. These aims can be thought as a matter of the personal existential/religious/spiritual 'Bildung' of the pupils, socialising them into the national-cultural heritage and values said to be intimately linked to the majority religion and/or social-ethical aims such as (inter-religious/inter-cultural) dialogue and citizenship education in order to meet contemporary challenges. The focus on such aims and the subject-specific pedagogical and didactical approaches often promoted as the best way to achieve them will often lead to the prioritisation of other kinds of knowledge and skills than subject-specific knowledge, skills and teaching based on the study of religions—or at least reduce the time available for the latter. Hence, priority may not be given to important *subject-specific general knowledge* about religion(s) as diverse phenomena which are part of how people construct, organise, classify and transmit social and cultural 'worlds' or systems and how people act, think and ascribe meaning to the world. Similarly, there is little time to study the temporal, contextual, situated, interested and material dimensions and processes of religious phenomena and, in particular, to learn about and try to use subject-specific theories and methods pertaining to the study of religions.

As shown above, this kind of knowledge and skills is almost absent from the national curriculum and some of the most used learning materials for RE in Danish primary schools, in stark contrast to the RE taught in upper secondary schools. One important reason for this is that strong

opposition has been expressed by influential stakeholders over the years towards linking RE to any basic scientific discipline (including theology) and what they see as 'academicisation' of the subject. To many teachers, stakeholders, politicians and so on, RE is a 'Bildung' and 'culture-bearing' subject. The head of the RE teacher association and member of the group drafting the national curricula for many years time and again argues that the main aim of RE is not to gain (academic) knowledge and skills, but to form or develop the personality of the pupils, including their spiritual and ethical edification (Møller, 2021).

This position, together with the focus on future-oriented general competences and skills and the postmodernist critique of 'objective' knowledge, can be criticised for devaluing academic-based knowledge and theories in general and in schools and teaching (Young, 2013). It is also criticised for expressing problematic binary opposition between 'Bildung' and 'knowledge and skills' or 'teacher- and knowledge-based teaching' (thought to be about facts and transmission) and 'pupil-centred teaching' (Andreassen, 2019, p. 82). However, as pointed out by scholars of education, 'Bildung' cannot in school and education be separated from subject-specific knowledge and skills. The pupils need subject-specific theories, methods and general knowledge that are different from their everyday knowledge and experiences and a teaching that enable them to produce knowledge. Theories, methods and subject-specific general knowledge can help pupils to see, understand, analyse and discuss structures and relations in the world that they would otherwise not have seen. Thus, it is not about socialising pupils into existing values, 'cultural heritage', power structures and social hierarchies, but about contributing to their ability to discern accepted power structures and challenge and change them, if needed (Biesta, 2013; von Oettingen, 2016; Young, 2008, 2013; Ziehe, 2004).

RE must focus on *subject-specific general knowledge* about religion and religious aspects as human, historical, social and cultural changeable and diverse phenomena as well as the central *conceptual knowledge* and *subject-specific skills* required to be able to study these aspects. Pupils need theories and methods to help them analyse, compare and discuss issues on 'religion' and 'religions' as diverse and integrated phenomena of other social and cultural spheres from a study of religions perspective, and be

able to see how this is different from a personal, religious or anti-religious perspective. The *content knowledge* thus also must focus on central concepts such as 'religion' and 'world religions' and the public and political communication about religion(s). While it may be possible to identify some overall content areas, it is more difficult (and may not be desirable) to identify a more specific list of content areas which should be seen as *the* core subject content knowledge in the study of religion and RE. As pointed out by scholars of religion, RE based on the study of religions must always be open to self-reflective and self-critical discussion in regard to the question of *what*, *how* and why, and such discussion can also be seen as an important element of content knowledge of RE (Alberts, 2007; Jensen, 2019).

This kind of RE requires properly *subject-specific-trained* teachers. This is, however, not the case in Denmark, where RE in the primary school continues to be the one subject taught by the largest percentage (58.7%) of teachers without specific training (EVA, 2021, s. 24). Moreover, while there are many engaged, skilled and qualified RE teachers, many do not know about the theoretical and methodological reflections and developments in the study of religions and/or new RE research. Things do change in various countries, and there seem to be a willingness and openness to include a study of religions-based perspective to some degree. As also argued by Tim Jensen (2019) and Wanda Alberts (2007), this means that (RE) scholars of religion must be willing to enter this field in practice, for example by taking part in the education of teachers, writing learning materials for pupils, students and teachers, participating in research and development projects together with teachers and trying to influence the curriculum. If (RE) scholars from the study of religions do not take part in such activities, these questions will be answered by others, leaving RE open to domination by religious, political and ideological interests and/or approaches that primarily focus on various forms of personal existential/spiritual/religious and/or social-ethical aims. RE will thus continue to be a 'special' school subject in which academic (study of religions)-based knowledge and skills are absent or not prioritised. Like the academic study of religions, RE *can* be deconstructed and reconstructed—but it takes time, patience, willingness and continuing efforts to do so.

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10

Worldview Literacy as Transformative Knowledge

Martha Shaw

Introduction

In 2018 the Commission on Religious Education for England and Wales published its report and proposed National Entitlement (CoRE, 2018). The proposals have been heralded as a 'paradigm shift' towards a 'worldviews approach' (Cooling et al., 2020). Worldviews is a contested term (Benoit et al., 2020) and what a worldviews approach means is by no means settled. What is clear though is that it represents a shift away from the 'world religions' approach that has dominated RE in England since the 1970s and, as such, offers the possibility of a shift in thinking about the nature and role of knowledge in RE.

Following the CoRE report, the English Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) conducted a research review around Religious Education, which, in drawing on recent developments in the field, presents a framework of three forms of knowledge involved in the subject.

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These are described as 'substantive', 'disciplinary' and 'personal' knowledge (Ofsted, 2021). The knowledge question has long troubled RE (see Kueh, 2018, 2020; Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2021) and the Ofsted review offers a welcome framework for thinking about the kinds of knowledge involved in the study of religion/worldviews. How these forms of knowledge are understood and translated into practice remains to be seen, and the relationship between them is still to be articulated.

This chapter presents the idea of 'worldview literacy' as a framework to support worldviews education and for understanding the relationship between these three types of knowledge. This builds on the concept of 'religious literacy', but goes beyond reductive conceptualisations of the latter as knowledge, skills and attitudes vis-à-vis religious diversity, to present a framework for a transformative process of educational praxis.

Understood as a process of praxis in which interpretation and application are interwoven, worldview literacy emphasises the interdependency of substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge in a process of critical, reflexive interpretation that is inseparable from skills development and personal formation. I will argue that this process is transformational in two senses: firstly, in relation to the individual who undergoes a transformation through reflexive encounter with the subject matter and, secondly, in relation to the public sphere as the process is an enactment of engagement in plurality that promotes critical consciousness and empathy. I suggest that employed as a framework to support curriculum planning and classroom practice, worldview literacy can contribute to the 'unlocking of human powers' (Deng, 2021) and so to ways of rethinking ideas of 'powerful knowledge' (Young & Muller, 2016). In relation to Religious Education, this offers a way of reconciling what are sometimes seen as conflicting aims of personal, social and academic development.

The Knowledge Turn

Within ongoing debates around the aims and purposes of RE in English schools, the subject has not been immune to the 'turn to knowledge' embraced by our school system. This is evident, for example, in the increased focus on content and the acquisition of knowledge about

religion and belief in the 2015 GCSE[1] Religious Studies examination reforms and in increased attention to the disciplines underpinning RE (Georgiou & Wright, 2018; Kueh, 2020). The development of 'knowledge-rich' RE is seen by many as contributing to the academic rigour and thus the status of the subject. Yet RE is a multidisciplinary subject and rather than the aim being the mastery of one or more of its academic parents, disciplines have been presented as lenses through which pupils might make sense of the complexity of religion and worldviews (O'Grady, 2022; Freathy et al., 2017). Thus, the CoRE report suggests that the study of religion and worldviews draws on disciplines such as 'anthropology, area studies, hermeneutics, history, other human and social sciences, philosophy, religious studies and theology among others' (CoRE, 2018, p. 37). So too, Wright and Kueh posit theology, philosophy and the human sciences as the key disciplinary lenses (see Kueh, 2020; Georgiou & Wright, 2018).

This multi-disciplinarity reflects the multidimensional nature of RE and underpins ongoing debate around its aims and purposes. Whilst critical academic enquiry is certainly a key aim, RE is variably associated with more instrumental goals, both socially or civic oriented and those that relate to personal development. Ofsted's recent suggestion that three types of knowledge, 'substantive', 'disciplinary' and 'personal', stand as the pillars of progression in RE (Ofsted, 2021) builds on Kueh's work in terms of embracing knowledge richness as the key to curriculum design (Kueh, 2018) whilst also reflecting broader educational purposes. The inclusion of personal knowledge suggests a broader formational role. Beyond 'recontextualising' knowledge from parent academic disciplines, as in Young et al.'s 'disciplinary knowledge', the combination of three types of knowledge provides the context for more attention to the transformation of 'disciplinary knowledge into educational purposes' (Deng, 2021, p. 1654).

[1] The General Certificate of Secondary Education—a qualification taken at age 16 in academic subjects in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

'Worldviews' as More than Content

Based on research conducted in English schools around stakeholders' aspirations for RE (Dinham & Shaw, 2015, 2017), Adam Dinham and I made some recommendations around content: that it should better reflect the changing contemporary religious and non-religious landscape and the fact that worldviews are dynamic, fluid and lived, emphasising identity alongside tradition. We also suggested an explicit focus on the category 'religion', exploring the concept itself, how 'religion' is classified, and its relationship to the secular. As embodied in the CoRE report (2018), it is now widely accepted that RE ought to embrace the diversity both between and within religious traditions, and there is a broad consensus that it should include non-religious traditions. Whilst there is no set definition of the term 'worldview', and its usage varies across disciplines and contexts (Benoit et al., 2020; Bråten & Everington, 2019), it can be broadly understood as denoting religious and non-religious ways of being in the world. The CoRE report describes a worldview as someone's 'way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes how a person understands the nature of reality and their own place in the world. A person's worldview is likely to influence and be influenced by their beliefs, values, behaviours, experiences, identities and commitments' (CoRE, 2018, p. 4). Worldviews then are about more than a set of beliefs and practices related to a tradition. There is growing recognition of the need to focus on worldviews as identity and as lived. Indeed, the CoRE report distinguishes between 'institutional' and 'personal' worldviews, acknowledging worldview as lived experience and identity that are fluid and hybrid. The retention of 'religion' in the proposed name-change to 'Religion and Worldviews' emphasises too the need to focus on religion as a conceptual category, alongside 'secularity', 'secularism' and 'spirituality' (CoRE, 2018).

Whilst these changes are important in developing students' understanding of the 'real religion and worldview landscape', the move towards worldviews education reflects more than a broadening or deepening of content. It presents a wholescale shift away from the dominant world

religions paradigm, associated with 'objective' knowledge about religion, towards a much more holistic, reflexive educational approach. As it is being articulated by its proponents in England, a worldviews approach adopts a hermeneutical frame, in order that students 'come to understand how worldview works in human life' (Cooling et al., 2020, p. 42), as a 'matter of interpretation' (ibid., p. 61). With this reframing is a shift in pedagogical approach, from one based on the acquisition of content (knowledge) to a process of dialogical encounter between the pupils and the subject matter. Dialogical or hermeneutical approaches are not new to RE, and a worldviews approach draws on these, including Jackson's interpretivist approach (Jackson, 1997), and on the work of David Aldridge (2011, 2015), which foreground a Gadamerian process of understanding, a 'fusion of horizons', in which the student is transformed through reflexive encounter with the subject matter.

Why 'Worldview Literacy'?

I have elaborated elsewhere on the idea of worldview literacy as a framework for this process of understanding (Shaw, 2020, 2022). In this chapter, I focus on how it might support the articulation of a worldviews approach by providing a framework for thinking about how 'substantive', 'disciplinary' and 'personal knowledge' are related in RE and for a more holistic, transformative educational process that challenges content-focused curriculum planning and pedagogy. This is important if the critical and transformative potential of a worldviews approach is not to get lost within a school system that is governed by a performativity agenda.

Before presenting worldview literacy as a framework for thinking about knowledge in the study of religion/worldviews, I wish to briefly explain the rationale for a new terminology. Why not stick with 'religious literacy'? The reasons for this are twofold, relating to the reductive way in which religious literacy is often understood and the shifting scene in English RE.

Religious literacy remains a contested concept (Dinham, 2020) and its value as an aim of Religious Education is debated (Biesta et al., 2019). As the latter highlight, its value as an educational aim partly depends on

what is meant by 'literacy' and 'religion', both themselves open to interpretation. That said, alongside other literacies such as political, cultural and financial, having an understanding of religion, and the skills to engage positively with religious diversity, is considered an important part of education for the twenty-first century (COE, 2008; Eurydice, 2017; UNESCO, 2015). Religious literacy remains an often-cited aim of Religious Education in England (Ofsted, 2010) and internationally (Franken, 2017; Halafoff et al., 2020; Marcus & Ralph, 2021). The concept is however problematic in that it is often understood in reductive terms as the acquisition of substantive knowledge of the majority religions, alongside the development of certain skills and attitudes vis-à-vis religious diversity and living in a religiously plural society. This is problematic for several reasons: firstly, because normative and narrow interpretations of the 'religions' that one should be literate about, serve to reinforce essentialist notions of religion and overlook the diversity, hybridity and fluidity of religions and non-religious worldviews as evidenced in contemporary research (Shaw, 2018; Hannam et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021). Such conceptions can also minimise the critical dimension, overlooking the importance of understanding the sociopolitical dimension of religion, the role (good and bad) that religion plays in history and contemporary society (Davie, 2015; Moore, 2007). Furthermore, benign, essentialist representations of religions, as objective 'knowledge' can overlook the need for the critical deconstruction of the very notion of 'religion' and its representation in society, including in education.

A further problem relates to the relationship between religion(s), knowledge about them and the individual. Religious literacy, as it is often employed, can reinforce the idea that religions or worldviews are 'out there' as things in the world that the individual needs to make sense of or understand rather than seeing the individual as part of this plurality. Prothero's (2007) notion of religious literacy builds directly on Hirsch's (1987) ideas on cultural literacy in suggesting there are building blocks of knowledge about religions that everyone or every American should know. This is related to a 'content' focused approach in which religious literacy is seen as a product of education—a set of prescribed knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be learnt and that then inform engagement with

diversity. This overlooks both the contribution of the individual to knowledge and the value of the educational process itself as a part of enactment in diversity with transformational potential.

My understanding of worldview literacy goes beyond a change in content to address the educational process itself and how to unlock the substance of the content, to present a way of translating curriculum content 'into events and tasks that bring about 'fruitful' encounters between students and content' (Deng, 2021, p. 1658). Changing the name from 'religious' to 'worldview' literacy then denotes both an explicit broadening of the subject matter and reflects a particular approach to education, based on hermeneutic understanding.

As a framework, worldview literacy is distinct from reductionist understandings of religious literacy in its focus on process and on the interdependent nature of content and action. Worldview literacy is not a product of education in the sense that pupils become worldview literate, but a framework for an educational process of reflexive engagement in plurality. This distinction rests on the explicit foregrounding of three key foci: *interpretability*, *reflexivity* and *transformative encounter*. Each of these suggests a rethinking about the nature and purpose of knowledge in RE and when woven together present a process of educational praxis in which knowledge and the 'knowers' are transformed.

Interpretability

A worldviews approach acknowledges that worldviews are diverse and dynamic and can be interpreted in different ways by their adherents. There is a focus on 'lived' worldviews, how they are understood and experienced in daily life and how they change over time. Within worldview literacy, this interpretability becomes the central focus and worldviews understood as being in a constant process of change through human interaction. Both personal and organised worldviews can be understood as being in constant flux as people 'live in and from and through tradition' (Meijer, 2006, p. 13). There is much debate around what might be the 'generalizable principles' of RE. After all, according to Young and Muller, 'access to such principles is a major reason why all countries have

schools' (2016, p. 103). I argue that a general principle of the study of worldviews is their interpretability, that they are contested and in constant transition.

A focus on lived worldviews brings this principle together with the diversity of expressions and experiences of worldviews, what might form part of pupils' 'everyday knowledge' (Young, 2007). As argued by Van der Kooij et al. (2013), the diverse personal worldviews of those identifying with religions should be a subject of classroom discussion. Rather than seeing this as inferior to 'curriculum knowledge', the two are reunited through a focus on lived experience as interpretation. As worldviews are in transition through interpretation, so therefore is knowledge about them. The focus on interpretability acknowledges the role of the individual in reshaping tradition through encounter and emphasises the 'symbiotic relationship between knowledge and the knower' (Freathy & John, 2019).

This focus on the interpretability of worldviews inevitably extends to the interpretability of received knowledge about them. As Adam Dinham and I have argued (Dinham & Shaw, 2015, 2017; Dinham, 2020), there should be a specific focus on the categorisation of religion and worldviews (e.g. what gets classed as religion and the relationship between the religious and the secular). Worldview literacy should include an explicit deconstruction of knowledge of religion and worldviews—an unpicking of essentialist representations. As Goldburg suggests, we should be asking, 'What knowledge is revered? Whose histories are legitimated? Whose voices are silenced? What religions are marginalised or excluded within dominant discourses?' (Goldburg, 2010, p. 353). This necessarily includes an explicit deconstruction of how knowledge has been 'recontextualised' (Bernstein, 2000) for the classroom context—how it has been 'modified by selection, simplification, condensation, and elaboration' and 'repositioned and refocused' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 87). This involves unpicking the social and political basis and biases that have shaped the recontextualisation process. Given its multidisciplinary nature, within RE this epistemic awareness is not solely related to Religious Studies, although there is much to unpick there (Flood, 1999; Nye, 2019), but related to RE's other 'parent disciplines' such as anthropology and sociology. It is also important in relation to everyday representations, for example, in the

media. This is not to dismiss 'knowledge' about religions as presented in scripture or as observed in ritual, but to argue that education should call out the interpretive nature of that knowledge as an understanding of a person (or group of people) in a time and place.

With a focus on interpretability, disciplines are seen less as sources of knowledge in themselves as lenses through which students might develop epistemic awareness. The focus on interpretability helps us move away from a 'knowledge rich' to a 'knowledge powerful' understanding in which '"knowledge about knowledge" is a specialist form of enquiry' (Young & Muller, 2016, p. 93). In this sense, the disciplines employed in RE are a source of power, as interpretations, offering new ways of knowing about the world that can address important issues of power in knowledge construction. Such a focus contributes to what Stones and Fraser-Pearce term 'epistemic literacy', the 'nuanced and reflexive understanding of how knowledge works' (Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022, p. 98), which they argue should be a key aim of education.

Reflexivity

The second strand of worldview literacy is reflexivity, a key focus of interpretive approaches in RE (Jackson, etc.) and approaches to critical religious literacy (Dinham, 2020, Goldburg, 2010). Within a process of worldview literacy, the epistemic awareness developed in relation to substantive knowledge is nurtured at the personal level as students are enabled to recognise their own positionality, the assumptions and bias that may shape their understanding. Based on a hermeneutical process of understanding, a focus on reflexivity reflects Gadamer's argument that when encountering religion and worldviews as 'other', this is best understood when explored in relation to students' own 'fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1975).

I suggest that an explicit process of 'self-critical scholarship' (Goldburg, 2010, p. 352) or metacognition is a crucial part of powerful knowledge in RE. A focus on reflexivity, on the dialectic relationship between student and subject matter, brings together 'substantive' and 'personal' knowledge.

The process is particularly important if the idea of 'personal knowledge' is not to be reduced to one's opinion or experience. As defined by Ofsted, personal knowledge is when 'pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study' (Ofsted, 2021, 8). This is more than understanding that people may see things or act in a certain way because of their personal 'worldview', although that is itself a huge step from the homogenising of people by emphasising common ground between traditions. Personal knowledge involves recognising the dynamic relationship between one's personal worldview and those of others. This requires going beyond the recognition of difference and where it might come from, to explore the meeting of worldviews—for example, recognising that one's position is one of suspicion, fear or hostility, superiority or deference to another. This awareness is part of Stones and Fraser-Pearce's 'epistemic literacy', the awareness of one's own epistemic preferences and 'blind spots' which have implications for understanding and empathising with others (Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022). Personal knowledge is then not simply one's way of understanding the world; it is both understanding where your view comes from with an explicit awareness of how your view has moved on through encounter with the subject knowledge.

O'Grady (2022) highlights the tendency amongst those in favour of a knowledge-rich or disciplinary-oriented RE, to minimise or to separate out personal development. The re-introduction of personal knowledge can be interpreted as a re-vamped 'learning from' (Grimmitt, 1987), which whilst welcomed by many can be seen as at odds with and a threat to the academic rigour of the subject. This misses the point. Firstly, it ignores the difference between curriculum and pedagogy (Grimmitt never suggested that 'learning from' was to be given specific curriculum time or that it should be a separate attainment target). More importantly to the argument I am making here, personal knowledge, along with substantial and disciplinary knowledge are interdependent parts of the same process of *understanding*. It is through interaction between the student's own perspective (or worldview) and that of others that understanding happens. Bringing that process of interaction into the frame in an explicit

way through a process of reflexive encounter or metacognition develops the student's personal knowledge or positionality which is a key academic skill.

Transformative Encounter

I have argued elsewhere that worldview literacy can be understood as engagement with difference and different ways of understanding the world through which one's own self is put into question and ultimately transformed (Shaw, 2022). Personal knowledge as described above is the developing ability to think reflexively about one's own positionality in relation to worldviews. This transformational process is neither simply intellectual nor personal. Rather, it is about the student's orientation to the world. As described by Bamber et al., 'transformative education involves an ontological process that elevates the importance of existential change for the learner, as regards both their way of being in the world and ways of knowing that world' (Bamber, 2016, cited in Bamber et al., 2018, p. 217). As with Biesta's notion of 'subjectification', this is about a process of empowering young people to 'come into the world' and enabling them to engage with it (Biesta, 2013). Biesta contends that the 'I' that develops through a process of 'subjectification' does so through encounter with the other—when the 'I' is put into question: 'This is not then, the moment where the individual asserts itself into the world as meaning-maker or learner, it rather is the moment where the "I" as subject is called into the world, called into existence' (Biesta, 2021, p. 16). Biesta is clear that this is not a matter of 'finding oneself' in terms of identity, but 'a matter of existence, of existing in and with the world "outside" of oneself' (Biesta, 2021, p. 18).

Such a process can only happen through encounter, which, as pointed out by O'Grady (2022), is an often neglected, yet important, aspect of the CoRE proposals: 'It is our view that learning about a worldview without reference to the lived experience of adherents, and where possible direct encounter with them is insufficient for effective learning in Religion and Worldviews' (CoRE, 2018). It goes without saying that a diversity of representation is essential if that action is to be oriented outside the individual and to their relationship with the world in all its plurality. As

argued by Hannam and Biesta, 'if education and, more specifically, RE has a concern for the public sphere, for the life we live together *with others*, it needs to make sure that children and young people can begin and, most crucially, encounter the beginnings of others in this process' (Hannam & Biesta, 2019).

As I have elaborated elsewhere (Shaw, 2022), understood an encounter in plurality, worldview literacy bridges the aims of RE and citizenship education. The connections between worldviews education and intercultural citizenship education are manifold and well explored by many (Jackson, 2016, 2019; Johannessen & Skeie, 2019; Franken, 2021; O'Grady, 2019; Gunnarsson, 2021; Halafoff et al., 2016; Iliško, 2019). Worldview literacy can support the kind of critical self-examination that Nussbaum (2006) argues is required to combat stereotypes and promote empathy and understanding, and critical to a sense of connectedness as global citizens. Through a focus on the complexity and dynamism of worldview identity, it can contribute too to understandings of cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2003), contributing to a 'counter-narrative' (Starkey, 2021) to exclusivist notions of citizenship and engendering a sense of 'world-mindedness' that empowers young people to be active agents in tackling global issues (Iliško, 2019). Crucially, worldview literacy promotes a process of transformational encounter, essential to intercultural understanding and global responsibility that is both existential and socially oriented through action.

Worldview Literacy as Praxis

As argued above, worldview literacy, understood as a process of reflexive dialogical encounter with difference, is different from understandings of religious literacy as something that is to be gained and then informs or prepares young people for engagement with diversity. In highlighting a focus on *interpretability*, *reflexivity* and *transformational encounter*, worldview literacy can be understood as educational praxis: an interwoven practice of understanding, interpretation and application that operates in a hermeneutic spiral (Bernstein, 1983). This process brings together substantive knowledge (of worldviews as lived) and disciplinary knowledge

(as understanding of worldviews as interpretable), developed and applied through dialogic, reflexive encounter that informs the student's personal knowledge (understanding of their relationship to the world), which in turn informs their engagement in it.

It is through encounter that the student's understanding is applied as *phronesis*, a practical wisdom based on values, concerned with practical judgement and informed by reflection. Phronesis is 'pragmatic, variable, context-dependent, and oriented toward action' (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012, p. 2). So too, through encounter with the interpretability of worldviews, phronesis is informed and re-evaluated as students develop understanding of difference and of themselves in relation to it. Similarly, Cooling et al. see the interaction of substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge as a hermeneutical process in which the awareness of worldview developed by pupils 'will contribute to their academic understanding, their personal development and their growth as active citizens' (Cooling et al., 2020, p. 61).

A Reconciliation of Aims

Worldview literacy thus serves as a framework for worldviews education that reduces the gap between subject and object or personal formation and content knowledge (Iliško, 2019) and between understanding and action. As such, it addresses the false binary between 'learning about' and 'learning from' (Grimmitt, 1987) that makes dialogue over future of RE difficult (Franck & Thalen, 2021). In a process of praxis, what might be considered the intrinsic aim of academic development (critical understanding of worldviews and the construction of knowledge about them) is inseparable from the instrumental goals of personal formation and civic participation (as self-aware engagement in plurality).

As commented and illustrated in several examples by O'Grady (2022), there is more understanding of this approach outside of England, for example, in Norway, Latvia and the Netherlands. As a process of transformative encounter, worldview literacy and the 'worldviews approach' as understood by Cooling and colleagues sit more comfortably within Didaktik, as developed in continental European teacher education,

particularly in Germany and the Nordic context (Hopmann, 2007) than in the Anglo-American content-focused context, where, as Hopmann argues, it is almost unknown. At the heart of Didaktik is the idea of *bildung*, which in the words of Wolfgang Klafki, pioneer of bildung-centred didaktik, 'refers to the formation of the full individual, the cultivation of human powers, sensibility, self-awareness, liberty and freedom, responsibility and dignity' and 'the development of self-determination (autonomy), co-determination (participation) and solidarity' (Klafki, 1998, cited in Deng, 2018, p. 374).

As with Biesta's subjectification, bildung is about 'more than mastery of contents or development of competencies and abilities, more than "knowing something" or "being able to do it"' and about 'the use of knowledge as a transformative tool of unfolding the learner's individuality and sociability' (Hopmann, 2007, p. 115). With the focus on the encounter between student and content as a transformational process, worldview literacy is in line with Deng's (2021) case for linking the teaching of content knowledge to the development of human powers (understanding, ways of thinking, capabilities and dispositions) by way of knowledge transformations.

Worldview Literacy and Powerful Knowledge

Within bildung, an important distinction is made between the subject itself and its 'educative substance'. Thus Deng (2021) argues that the didaktik tradition and the concept of bildung offer an understanding of 'powerful knowledge' in which it is not the knowledge or content that is powerful in itself, but about the potential of content for unlocking 'human powers'. In a critique of what he sees as Young and colleagues' 'exclusive focus on the internal properties and explanatory power of knowledge', Deng (2018, p. 136), borrowing from Hamilton (1999), suggests that the focus be less on 'what should they [students] know?' and more on 'what should they [students] become?' (Hamilton, 1999, cited in Deng, 2018, p. 136). Similarly, Hopmann argues bildung is about 'more than mastery of contents or development of competencies and abilities, more than "knowing something" or "being able to do it"'

(Hopmann, 2007, p. 115). The purpose of teaching is then 'the use of knowledge as a transformative tool of unfolding the learner's individuality and sociability' (Hopmann, 2007, p. 15). Hopmann explains that within Didaktik, the contents of teaching, for example, the 'Great War' or basic arithmetic, are not important simply in terms of knowing history, or being able to count, although these may be outcomes. What is important is what pupils learn about mankind by understanding the course of the Great War or about numbering the world by counting (Hopmann, 2007). Hopmann emphasises that it is not 'that what is learned about mankind, the world or my inner being is inherent to the subject matter at hand' but that 'the meaning of these learning experiences emerges within the learning process itself, based on the meeting of a unique individual with a matter at hand' (Hopmann, 2007, p. 116). In relation to worldviews education, through a process of encounter in which students engage critically and reflexively with worldviews as ideas, lived experiences and social and political phenomena, they are led to a greater understanding of the world and their relation to it. Thus, within worldview literacy, the focus is on the 'fruitful encounter' between the content and the learner rather than on the transmission of content.

With importance given to the 'meeting' of students and content, 'the criteria for knowledge selection and organisation are not residing in the academic discipline, but deriving from a vision of education' (Deng, 2021, p. 1665). Thus students' 'everyday knowledge' of worldviews and the practical wisdom developed are themselves powerful knowledge in that they are part of a process of 'human flourishing' (Biesta, 2013, p. 133).

Within worldview literacy, the focus on *interpretability* echoes the perspective of Bildung and Didaktik that 'there is no matter without meaning, and no meaning without matter' (Hopmann, 2007, p. 16). As Hopmann asserts, this is not a natural feature of teaching in the UK and why the meaning of any knowledge, its construction and its interpretation by individual who 'meets' it should be made an explicit part of the teaching process. Again, this is not to say that a focus on disciplines is not useful to the study of worldviews but that their usefulness as interpretations should be made explicit. Worldview literacy then provides a framework for how the student meets the content (substantive knowledge)

through a reflexive process which highlights the interpretability of that knowledge (including disciplinary knowledge) and of their own experience to develop a critical understanding of the world and their relation to it (personal knowledge). In this sense, it can help to unlock the potential of content for the development of 'human powers' (Deng, 2021, p. 1668), to render that knowledge powerful.

A Way Forward for RE?

In this sense, the power in worldview literacy lies in the provision of a framework for bringing together substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge through action. This promotion of praxis presents a challenge to content-focused curricula and pedagogy and has consequences for teaching. In stressing the interwoven nature of the intrinsic and instrumental aims of RE, there is also perhaps a safeguarding against its reduction to a set of generic skills or values and everyday accounts and against reinforcing stereotypes around religion and worldviews that threaten both students' critical understanding of and engagement in plurality.

Lastly, it is important to note that whilst worldview literacy is presented here as a framework for bringing the subjective back into RE, a focus on the critical, reflexive 'event' of understanding is, of course, not unique to the study of worldviews. However, RE may be well placed as a driver of more transformational approaches for a number of reasons. The first relates specifically to the English system in which RE is often marginalised yet has the odd status of being statutory (in schools, not Further Education Colleges) until the age of 18, although it remains optional as an examination subject. Whilst in practice this means that RE is often neglected, it can also provide a unique space outside the restraints of the performativity agenda with potential for innovation. This is evidenced in a set of case studies developed to showcase approaches to worldviews education in England, where freedom from the examined space was a key enabling factor.[2] Secondly, dealing as it does with people's deep-felt values and convictions, RE provides the opportunity for encounter with

[2] See https://www.gold.ac.uk/faithsunit/current-projects/reforreal/case-studies/.

difference at the level of the experiential, the everyday and the more existential. Finally, RE has traditionally had a formational role, and whilst the kind of human flourishing aimed for through a process of worldview literacy is absolutely not to be confused with the inculcation of specific values, any more than it is the transmission of prescribed knowledge, it may provide a launch pad for reinforcing the idea of personal knowledge as interrelated with content.

Yet as argued in this chapter, worldview literacy has educational value beyond the RE classroom and as elaborated elsewhere (Shaw, 2022) has particular importance for citizenship education. Furthermore, what I have presented as the key elements of worldview literacy, *interpretability*, *reflexivity* and *transformative encounter* could be built into all subjects as describing and making explicit a process of understanding and facilitating capabilities required of citizens. As evidenced in the growing wealth of classroom materials and practices that promote a worldviews approach (see, e.g. Cooling et al., 2020, Larkin et al., 2020), this may provide a platform for thinking more broadly about the nature and purpose of schooling and the place of knowledge therein.

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11

RE and the Complexity of the Knowledge Problem(s)

Peder Thalén

Introduction

Researchers have recently sounded the call to develop a clear knowledge base for non-confessional Religious Education (RE) (see, e.g., Kueh, 2018; Franck, 2021). In order to justify the existence of the subject in schools, it is not sufficient to refer to the positive effects that the subject might have on society and the individual, be they the fostering of democracy or the flourishing of the individual or something else; first, we need to figure out what kind of knowledge has the potential to create such desirable effects, a type of knowledge that has its own intrinsic strength and is not understood to be merely an instrument.

The ambition to establish a clear knowledge base must also be understood against the school subject's complicated background in countries where non-confessional religious education has evolved. This background comprises historically close ties between religion and education, like the

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national church's influence on the content of instruction. This also involves the fact that the schools have previously been a venue for collective worship (Kueh, 2018). Even though much of this has ceased apace with changes in society, uncertainty can nevertheless linger regarding the character of the school subject, to what extent it has liberated itself from the past and created an identity of its own, free from religious bonds (this situation may vary across countries). The project of developing a clear knowledge base can be understood in this context as an attempt to definitively cut the ties with this background and to dissipate the uncertainty that has engulfed the subject and its place among other school subjects.

However, the complicated background of the school subject and the difficulty of formulating a clear knowledge base constitute only one aspect of what has come to be called "the knowledge problem." A further challenge of the same dignity, but thus far less discussed in relation to RE, is the far-reaching (intra-)academic criticism that has been levelled against Religious Studies (RS), namely, that its most central concept—the concept of religion—is not valid as an analytical category. If this criticism is sound, this entails that the knowledge generated in RS does not enjoy the self-evident scholarly validity that has been taken for granted, which in turn negatively affects RE, which has unquestioningly been able to rely on RS as its "supplier" of specialised academic knowledge.

To be sure, it is a well-known phenomenon that various humanities and to some extent social scientific subjects suffer from internal strife between different fractions, with various perspectives battling each other. In philosophy, we have the familiar conflict between analytic and continental philosophy (though this has been moderated considerably). But what makes RS special in this regard is that the issue largely centres on the circumstance that the concept can be said to constitute the scholarly domain itself (RS is understood here in a broad sense to be synonymous with, in German, *Religionswissenschaft*, or, in Swedish, *religionsvetenskap*, meaning "science of religion"). In other words, the discussion is not merely about different orientations within a subject area, which can be said to be the case with the example from philosophy.

There can thus be no doubt that RE is indeed vulnerable to the criticism, long been promulgated within RS, of the use of religion as an analytical category. The question that arises is instead: just how vulnerable?

Is it sufficient within RE to account for previous points of departure that have uncritically rested on the concept of religion, for example, by trying to abandon "the world religion paradigm," or does RE need to take a step further by in some sense liberating itself from parts of RS, just as it freed itself from the national religion and certain forms of academic theology? But in that case what would this radical move involve? Does that not entail a dissolution of the idea of non-confessional religious education or, on the contrary, would it entail the freedom to recreate this concept on the basis of prevailing intellectual and cultural conditions? When these questions are posed, an intellectual quagmire is uncovered, one that we are tempted to slowly step away from. But this is not a serious position to assume.

In this chapter, I will attempt to hold together the two aspects of this expanded understanding of the "knowledge problem"— the question of what might be able to constitute a knowledge basis for the school subject and the alleged cracks in the foundation of RS as an academic endeavour. By way of introduction, I present some of the strategies for dealing with the knowledge issues that can be related to the first aspect. This will be followed by a review of the criticism that has been levelled against or can be levelled against RS from different quarters, thus addressing the second aspect. The chapter's latter part consists of an expanded discussion of "the knowledge problem" in that it relates the two aspects to each other.

The Knowledge Problem—Two Strategies to Ensure a Solid Knowledge Base

Different strategies can be discerned to bring order to the knowledge question and clarify what type of knowledge should be conveyed in RE. Two models will be discussed here: the "science model" and the "knowledge model." The former has existed for a longer time, while the other, which is based on the concept of powerful knowledge (PK), is under development. Much of the rich discussion that has been carried out regarding knowledge questions in relation to RE, especially in an

Anglo-Saxon context, will be omitted here, owing to space restrictions (see, e.g., Jackson, 2008; Wright, 2008).

As is evident from its designation, the "science model" is characterised by a strong emphasis on scientificity. The answer to the question of what type of knowledge is to be conveyed in RE based on this model is simple in a way: it is the academic, specialised knowledge that is produced in the various subdisciplines that are usually subsumed under "the study of religion" at university departments. In this model, there is thus a hierarchically ordered relationship between RS and RE. The former delivers knowledge to the latter. The scientific rigour of the subdisciplines that make up RS guarantees that the instruction in RE will be academically reliable and will pass on genuine knowledge, albeit in a simplified and pedagogically adapted form.

The question of what kind of knowledge RE is to convey is thus answered by referral to RS. As far as I can see, there is no genuine knowledge problem in ordinary forms of the science model; the main issue is rather one of scientific *purity*: to strictly monitor that the knowledge passed on in RE is not combined with some form of confessional features or, alternately, propagating an existing (semi)confessional RE to be transformed into a non-confessional RE.

A characteristic of the science model is the strong emphasis on learning *about* religion, which stands in contrast to both "learning in" and "learning from" religion; however, learning from the *study* of religion is fully compatible with the science model. Another characteristic, which reflects the close ties to the thinking of modernity, is its idealised image of the knowledge that is generated in RS. Researchers in RS are assumed to occupy an observation point similar to that of researchers in entirely different academic fields. In other words, the point of departure is a rather homogeneous concept of science.

In Sweden in the 1960s, when the subject of *kristendomskunskap* (literally "Christianity knowledge") was changed into what was regarded as an entirely non-confessional activity and eventually changed its name to *religionskunskap* (literally "religion knowledge"), the scientific model was the self-evident point of departure. The shift to a strict "learning about" also contained an echo from an anti-metaphysical turn in Swedish philosophy that took place in the early twentieth century but assumed a new form

under the influence of British empiricism and international analytical philosophy, which took over the leading Swedish universities after the Second World War. All of this also coincided with a period in Swedish cultural life that was characterised by born-again progressive thinking, where "religion" was regarded by influential intellectuals as more or less a thing of the past, something that could hamper progress and that we therefore needed to be liberated from.

A contemporary representative of the scientific model is the Danish scholar Tim Jensen, who, in a large number of works, has pleaded for "a study-of-religion(s)-based RE" in public schools (see, e.g., Jensen, 2021). In his case, the model is not characterised by the anti-religious attitudes that marked Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s; Jensen has a considerably more open approach that reflects today's altered society. But the basic features seem to be roughly the same: a strong emphasis on learning about religion where the teaching must observe water-tight bulkheads between learning about and learning in/from religion. It is important to point out in this context that this opposition is connected in turn to a concept of science in which it is meaningful to speak of "scientifically based knowledge in general" (Jensen, 2021, p. 181). Jensen thus appears to embrace the notion that there is some kind of essence— "something"— in all activities bearing the name of "science" and being carried out at universities:

> There is, thus, as I see it, something that qualifies as science and can be seen as different from non-science, and there is something that qualifies as (more or less) scientific studies of religion(s) to be distinguished from other approaches, including religious and some theological approaches, to religion. (Jensen, 2021, p. 186)

Jensen links this essence with, among other things, methodological agnosticism and being "'impartial', trying [one's] best to be 'neutral' and 'objective'" (p. 186). The positive value words in the quotation are treated as overarching labels of sorts, with a common content, regardless of a subject area.

The other strategy, the "knowledge model," has certain similarities to the first one, but there are also crucial differences. As already touched

upon, it represents an attempt to transfer the knowledge sociologist Michael Young's concept of "powerful knowledge" to the school subject of religious studies. Such a transfer is not without problems, however, because the powerful knowledge (PK) concept is easiest to explain if natural science is taken as an exemplar, which not least applies to the requirement of generalisability (Young, 2015).

When the PK concept is transferred to subjects in the humanities, a vagueness arises. In an article from 2019 written together with Johan Muller, they discuss the difference between physics and history as subjects. Referring to other researchers, they propose that these disparate subjects have differing "progression types" (p. 12), which is a result of their differing knowledge structure: "hierarchical for Physics, horizontal for History" (p. 12). They also accept the notion, derived from Counsell (2018), that physics and history as school subjects evince "distinctive pursuit(s) of truth" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 12). Unlike the science model, this model does not treat the concept of science as a homogeneous entity; instead, a characteristic of "true" knowledge (powerful knowledge) is that it can have different meanings in different contexts (Young, 2015). The crucial boundary does not go between science and non-science, but between knowledge that is specialised and disciplinary in contrast to everyday knowledge (Young, 2013). Another difference, which reflects the approach of sociology of knowledge, is the emphasis placed on all knowledge being historically situated (Young, 2010), albeit not bound to the conditions of its genesis.

The absence of a unified template for how the concept of powerful knowledge should be understood in every context in which instruction is given means that no useful concept has been elaborated for non-confessional studies of religion in school. A further difference in relation to the science model is thus that the knowledge model can be said to point to a "conceptual vacuum," a lack of theoretically expounded solutions to the knowledge problem in regard to certain subjects.

Nevertheless, several contributions have been made towards developing a theoretical basis for the school subject of religious studies. Richard Kueh has provided a rationale for developing a powerful knowledge base consisting of five concept-centred principles (Kueh, 2018). According to Kueh, "concepts are paramount" (p. 64), and the first principle states,

"RE brings substantive knowledge into the realm of disciplinary knowledge through concepts" (p. 64). A second principle distinguishes between under-socialised and over-socialised knowledge, while a third stresses that "truth claims" can be "comparatively, critically and competitively juxtaposed in a critical realism framework" (p. 64). A fourth principle engages with the concepts of identity and culture, while the fifth one stress that we live in an "inherently diverse world" (p. 66). This very brief summary does not do justice to Kueh's concept, but it provides a background to the optimism—"the possibility of human progress" (p. 67)—that Kueh gives expression regarding the potential for the school subject of religious studies:

> For Religious Education, powerful knowledge constitutes the *concepts that unlock a greater understanding* of the world; of the religions of the people who inhabit it; of human cultures and societies; of beliefs and values; of language and text; and of interpretation and thought. (p. 67, original italics)

However, Olof Franck has recently (Franck, 2021) pointed out that the concepts—truth, identity, culture, and diversity—that constitute the basis for Richard Kueh's five principles are not sufficiently specified: "These concepts are, however, quite general, and they can all be linked to different topics and different discourses. It is not obvious what role they can or should be expected to play in the development of powerful RE-knowledge" (p. 166). With reference to Meyer and Land (2005) as well as Niemi (2018), Franck proposes that the development of so-called threshold concepts could offer a way forward in concretising what powerful knowledge could mean for non-confessional RE.

A salient similarity between the two strategies—the science model and the knowledge model—is that the scientific foundation for RE, knowledge adopted from RS, is treated as being more or less unproblematic. Regarding powerful knowledge, it can be said that it is precisely one of its points that the knowledge conveyed in a school subject has its base in "specialized knowledge" (Young, 2013). Problematising this reliance on RS—by pointing to the inherent complications of the academic concept of religion—presents major implications for both models, which will be made apparent, even though the knowledge model, with its greater

flexibility in allowing the possibility of resting on a differentiated conception of science, is impacted to a lesser extent.

The critique of the concept of religion comprises several dimensions. It is not just a matter of the scientific foundation for RE being under question, or at least fraught with reservations. The criticism entails on a deeper plane, which has consequences for the principle of "knowledge through concepts," a sceptical approach to the academic formation of concepts. Just as theoretical concepts can open the door to a deeper understanding of reality, they can also contribute to the distortion of our understanding of reality in the service of various powerful interests. This dual capability, which appears to be a difference between, on the one hand, the humanities and the social sciences and, on the other hand, natural science, needs, as I see it, to be worked into a humanistic understanding of powerful knowledge.

The Collapse of the Analytical Category of Religion

In the field of research that has been called *critical religion*, criticism has long targeted the concept of religion and the research that has made use of that concept as an analytical category. A further criticism of the academic use of the same concept, inspired by Wittgenstein's later language philosophy, will be briefly presented here. The former critique is that the concept of religion as an analytical category contains a hidden normativity, whereas the latter aims to draw attention to an inherent mechanism of reinterpretation in the use of scientific language.

The principal argument from researchers in critical religion consists in the fact that the concept of religion has previously been treated as a universal category in RS, that it claims to describe something that has existed everywhere in all times, while, on closer analysis, this concept has proven to be a Western construction with Christian accoutrements (Fitzgerald, 2000). In other words, this is a radical interrogation that raises the issue of whether there is anything that corresponds to this category of religion

if we go outside the Western context, which makes talk of different "world religions" that can be compared and classified seem suspect (Owen, 2011).

The Swedish scholar of religion David Thurfjell (2016) summarises the criticism that critical religion has directed towards the scientific use of the concept of religion as follows: "instead of contributing to our knowledge and understanding, it can lead to the consolidation of Christian thought structures and the rendering of other folk groups as incomprehensible" (p. 264, my translation). According to Thurfjell, the concept of religion runs the risk of appearing to be the opposite of "descriptive, neutral and non-normative" (p. 262, my translation).

The critique of the concept of religion in the field of critical religion constitutes a comprehensive discussion that involves multiple aspects, only a few of which can be briefly treated here. One common argument is that the analytical category of religion has unclear boundaries. For instance, should spirituality—a very broad concept in itself—count as religion? Another objection to the category is that it tends to create artificial boundaries between what is identified as religion—moral teachings, rituals, philosophical systems and so on—and similar cultural phenomena that are encountered outside of what is designated as religion (cf. Thurfjell, 2016). As has already been made clear, a major feature of the criticism is that other cultures are ascribed characteristics that do not exist there: a reinterpretation occurs that reflects the observer's own frames of reference.

The criticism of the concept of religion has led to attempts in various subdisciplines to formulate a generally valid definition of the concept of religion with the help of terminology that does not presuppose any specifically Christian intellectual features. However, according to Nongbri (2013), "all the noble efforts to de-Christianize it [religion] … [have been] to some extent futile" (pp. 11–12). Such "cleansing" definitions still rest on an essentialist-coloured fundamental idea in that they persist in the presumption that it should be possible to formulate "religion as a universally definable category that can be defined in relation to a middle point" (Thurfjell, 2016, p. 267, my translation). The notion of such a middle point cannot be afforded any empirical support, however; on the contrary, it is contradicted by reality.

Among certain scholars in RS, there has been a shift in perspective as a result of the critique of the concept of religion, for example, a greater interest in studying the use of the term "religion," the actual discourse surrounding this term, instead of chasing the elusive phenomenon of religion. Others have scaled down their research to make cross-cultural comparisons of certain aspects, such as rites, or to settle for examining individual phenomena, which does not presuppose a universal definition of religion (cf. Madsen, 2012). However, Nongbri points out that there is considerable lag in the research world:

> it is still common to see even scholars using the word "religion" as if it were a universal concept native to all human cultures. In my own area of specialization, the study of ancient Mediterranean world, every year sees a small library's worth of books produced on such things as "ancient Greek religion". (Nongbri, 2013, p. 7)

It is not strange then that the concept of religion has not been assigned a prominent role, with some exceptions (see e.g., Alberts, 2017), in the discussion of RE or the syllabus for training teachers of RE in teacher education, despite the obvious relevance of such a discussion.

What has probably also blocked a discussion of the concept of religion in RE is the existence of prestigious disciplines with a natural science component where the concept of religion continues to be used as a universally applicable analytical category. Special mention should be made here of the cross-disciplinary orientation Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), a subdiscipline of Cognitive Science, which has attracted a great deal of interest recently. Publications in CSR had increased to 3000 per year by 2011, a rise of 314% calculated against the preceding decade (White, 2021, p. 2). An example of a research question that this branch considers meaningful is, "Why is religion so prevalent around the world?" (p. 2).

A partly different criticism of the academic use of the concept of religion can be levelled by scholars in philosophy of language. The focus here is on the logic of intra-scientific language use. If we take, for example, quantitatively oriented sociology of religion's studies of the status of Christianity in Sweden, which was previously my own field of research

(Thalén, 1997; 2006), we find that the language used here is characterised by an extremely high level of purported general validity. Concrete and historically determined boundary demarcations like Evangelical Lutheran versus non-Evangelical Lutheran or Christian versus non-Christian are replaced by language use where the boundary goes between religion/religious versus non-religion/non-religious. This new line of demarcation thus hovers in a linguistic space over the boundaries of confessions and traditions. It is thus possible to speak of the discipline's own language use, a constructed formation of concepts in which even word and phrase combinations that include the words "religion" and "religious" are assigned the same maximally ramped-up generality.

What are the consequences of applying this language use in empirical studies? Two inter-related mechanisms can be discerned. By enshrouding the individual observations of, for instance, a decline in the frequency of christening or confirmation, which has to do with events relating to a historically determined and chronologically definable church formation—Church of Sweden—in this language use, the observations are elevated to an absolute plane, where, instead, they are about a weakening of *religion* or a declining *religious* interest. In other words, we have a reinterpretation, a translation of sorts of empirical findings, the entire point of which is to claim enhanced general validity, but which also entails a higher level of abstraction. Because the terms "religion" and "religious" in the language of sociology of religion follow a logic that is not bound to historical or other demarcations, an image is invoked of an ongoing, major process of change: observations of a reduced frequency are interpreted not only as a weakening of the Church of Sweden (hardly a jarring fact to anyone who lives here), but also as a weakening of *religion*, which stands out as considerably more exciting and interesting. Are we seeing the end of religion, or will it be transformed into something new? And so on.

The first mechanism thus is about translating empirical observations into an absolutifying language use, whereby empirical observations are afforded a higher degree of general validity. The second mechanism, a consequence of the first step, is about how the formation of concepts, if we stick to the example above, creates the appearance of us, people in the Western world, being drawn into *a massive process*, which is professed to

be sociology of religion's object of study. The scientific concept apparatus, when interpreted literally, that is, when we ignore the fact that we are dealing with a translation and instead perceive our own activities as descriptive, thus tends to create a mythology.

How can the creation of this mythology be more clearly understood? What has been transmuted via scientific language into being about "the transformation of religion" tends to be perceived as an underlying, hidden process in the society that the scientific language is supposed to be about or depict, that is, what is created is a reality correlate to our own constructed language use. The content of the method of study is projected onto reality by the description and the reinterpretation becoming blurred in a conceptual fog (cf. Thalén & Cananau, 2022, pp. xiv–xvi). My own studies in philosophy of science dealt with Swedish publications in sociology of religion from the 1980s and 1990s, but the situation does not appear to have changed appreciably whether we limit ourselves to Sweden or look at the scientific scene in the outside world. A relatively fresh example of a grand formulation is the following:

> The decline of religion, common across the developed world and now evident even in the USA, is not an accident and nor is it the work of committed atheists. It is an unintended consequence of a series of subtle social changes. Modernization changes the status and nature of religion in ways that weaken it and make it difficult to pass successfully from generation to generation. (Bruce, 2017, p. 5)

The language-philosophy critique converges on important points with the criticism that has developed in the field of critical religion. Both views, though with different emphases, reject that the concept of religion is a universally applicable analytical category. Where they differ, among other ways, is that the language-philosophy method focuses on language's power to generate misleading images: "A *picture* held us captive" (Wittgenstein, 1997, p. 48). That method's sphere of applicability is also considerably broader in that—in principle—it has a critical edge directed towards all social and behavioural science research which is unable to distinguish between the form of observation and the object of study.

The heading of this section is "The Collapse of the Analytical Category of Religion." But it would be more correct to speak of "collapses" in the plural, one visible and one more invisible, with the latter involving an increased distance from the Enlightenment tradition. The criticism from the field of critical religion has grown into a potent intellectual movement in a few decades, effectively undermining the concept of religion as an analytical category. But in parallel with this we can observe a declining trust in science in society in general, which represents a danger, of course, but also, seen from another perspective, a sobering up. In the latter case, it is a matter of a more sensible view of human reason, an abandonment of the notion that we have access to a vantage point elevated above time and space, a "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986). Attempts to produce universal definitions of religion and the thought of religion as a universally applicable category were intellectual instruments that were at home on such an imaginary platform.

The principle promulgated in this chapter (more about this below)—that even what purports to be science and is pursued at state-funded academic institutions of learning needs to be treated with discernment—can be seen as an expression of a similar altered approach.

The Concept of Belief—the Next Object of Deconstruction?

Thus far, much has dealt with the unsuitability of studying phenomena outside of a Western context with the help of the concept of religion, but how about the study of Christianity in its original context? With RE in mind, it might seem important to illuminate the issue of whether the concept of religion is at least useful for the study of Christianity, not least because it is often afforded a prominent place in syllabuses for RE. Indeed, shouldn't the modern concept of religion be perfectly suited for such studies, considering its Christian roots?

To be able to discuss this matter, we take our point of departure in the thinking of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a pioneer in his day when it comes to criticising the concept of religion, even though some of his views are now considered outmoded (McCutcheon, 2019, p. 28).

A prominent theme in Smith's writing is that the modern concept of religion is coloured by an intellectual legacy that is philosophical in nature—European rationalism—tied to the thinking of the Enlightenment. If we factor in this aspect, the problem complex that is inherent in the culturally inherited concept of religion is broadened to also comprehend much-debated issues in contemporary philosophy. In other words, the difficulty in finding equivalents to what we mean by "religion" today outside of a Western context is a result not only of the Christian bias in the concept but also, to at least the same extent, of the philosophical mould.

In his famous work *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), Wilfred Cantwell Smith delineates how the concept of religion gradually undergoes a process of intellectualisation from the Renaissance onward (pp. 32–50). During the Renaissance and the Reformation, religion was still about an attitude to God and was more or less synonymous with personal piety. Only in the 1600s can we begin to discern a transformation of the concept, a kind of reification, where it gradually turns into an impersonal object, a system of ideas or doctrines, on the basis of which we can make judgements and which we can speak of in the plural—religions. The original question of how we should live has thus been transformed into a matter of the truth of metaphysical assertions:

> In pamphlet after pamphlet, treatise after treatise, decade after decade the notion was driven home that a religion is something that one believes or does not believe, something whose propositions are true or are not true, something whose *locus* is in the realm of the intelligible, is up for inspection before the speculative mind. This interpretation had by mid-eighteenth century sunk deep into the European consciousness. (Smith, 1991, p. 40)

According to Smith (p. 43), a final step in this evolution of the concept of religion is the advent of an abstract general concept of religion. It can be described as a kind of super-category that designates the sum of all individual systems of learning that could be classified or counted as "religion." This is where we find the historical roots of the abstract concept of religion that has become part of the repertoire of the social sciences, among other fields.

As the aforementioned quotation indicates, the words "believe" and "belief" (true or not true propositions) are closely related to the Enlightenment concept of religion—they are among its principal components. The words are marked by the same intellectualism—which means that the contemporary use of these words in academic and other contexts involves similar inherent problems as the concept of religion faces. It is my impression, however, that the problems surrounding their use have unfortunately been largely overlooked in the contemporary meta-discussion of the concept of religion.

What is important to point out here is that the shift in meaning that can be traced regarding the word "belief" and its close equivalents, such as "doctrine," follows a somewhat different pattern. In terms of the concept of belief, it is a matter of a shift from background to foreground. In Calvin the matter of the true worship of God is still the overarching issue, whereas "doctrines," sacraments and the interpretation of Scriptures, together with other features of the Christian faith, rather constitute means for attaining such piety (p. 39). A hundred years later a reversal has taken place where doctrines—beliefs—are called "the Christian religion," constituting a new foreground, while personal practice of belief has been relegated to the background.

The scope of this reversal becomes clearer if we add certain components from the field of history of science and ideas. It is not merely a matter of a new foreground but also a matter of this new foreground assuming a starkly altered character. After the Middle Ages, a revolutionary shift in authority took place in the West (Taylor, 2007). It is no longer God but rather human reason that occupies the centre, an autonomous reason that in leading philosophers of the Enlightenment is directed towards scrutiny of knowledge on the basis of purportedly eternally valid principles (which reason itself put in place). The ontological discourses of the scholastics about the nature of being were thus replaced by theories of knowledge (which is juxtaposed with the inherited tradition), and the role of the human subject becomes central.

The fact that doctrines/beliefs were placed in the foreground during the Enlightenment entailed that in a historically new way they became *optional* by being the object of rational critical scrutiny. Here we also add, as Gavin Hyman (2010), among others, has brought forward, the advent

of an altered image of God after the medieval period where God shrinks and becomes one part of reality. This issue of choice—what we are to believe in—thus eventually becomes primary, superseding the issue of how we should live.

This extremely concise summary of ideas in history, which is designed to remind us how the concept of religion, including its components "believe" and "belief," is intertwined with the Western philosophical tradition, also offers perspectives on some of the central issues under discussion today in connection with RE. One such issue is the proposal that RE should be completely or partially transformed into worldview education (cf. CoRE, 2018), an idea that, among other things, encompasses the notion that instruction should provide pupils with the groundwork to form their own "worldview." This proposal can initially seem democratic, but at the same time it entails, because "worldview" is normally perceived as being synonymous with a set of "beliefs" in the sense discussed here, that the pupil, without consent, will be schooled into a rational ideal that is anything but self-evident.

However, for Cantwell Smith, who is Christian, the major issue was about how the modern concept of belief had slipped into the practices of Christian churches and become part of their own self-understanding:

> The idea that believing is religiously important turns out to be a modern idea. It has arisen in recent times, in ways that can be ascertained and demonstrated. I might almost sum up the implication of my thesis, as distinct from the thesis itself, by saying that a great modern heresy of the Church is the heresy of believing. Not of believing this or that, but of believing as such. (Smith, 1985, p. v)

It is not necessary to share Smith's involvement in the situation of the Christian church or his reformist ambitions to readily see the inappropriateness of using in education a concept formation—the contemporary use of the terms "religion," "believe" and "belief"—in the study of Christianity that tends to offer a false picture of the entire segment of Christian tradition that preceded the Enlightenment:

> Faith is not belief, and with the partial exception of a brief aberrant moment in recent Church history, no serious and careful religious thinker has ever held that it was. (Smith, 1979, p. 127)

But, if we wish to turn it all around and see the possibilities for a pupil studying the Christianity section in RE, it could surely open up perspectives to be exposed to Smith's narrative. The fact that knowledge can open new perspectives entails in this proposed case not that a pupil acquires a new theoretical concept but that the pupil receives knowledge that challenges notions that are thought of a self-evident in the cultural context the pupil lives in.

A New Intellectual Platform for RE?

How should the science model and the various suggestions for a new knowledge model based on powerful knowledge be regarded in the light of this aggregated criticism of the use of the concept of religion and related language tools?

Two things need to be kept distinct: on the one hand, the criticism that can be levelled against each of the models separately and, on the other hand, the criticism that can be levelled against their shared trust in research in RS as being scientifically solid. Nevertheless, these two aspects need to be commented on together, as they are inter-related.

Is research in RS science? This question is actually entirely too comprehensive, as research in RS comprises myriad activities that differ from each other regarding method and content if we take into consideration all the subdisciplines and moreover that the question of what characterises science itself is a huge and long-debated issue. But purely in principle, if we indulge ourselves and go big, it is nonetheless possible to maintain that theoretical activity in RS that is based on a non-deconstructed variant of the concept of religion as an analytical category, or alternatively is based on a universal definition of religion formulated in non-religious terms or operating with an abstract distinction between religion and not religion, cannot claim to be a *descriptive* activity.

But if such activity in RS cannot be characterised as descriptive, what is it then all about? Broadly speaking, activity of this sort in RS—whether it is called "science" or not—rather appears to be a translation activity, consisting in translating various cultural phenomena by placing them in a predetermined interpretive framework that in some cases shows clear signs of various forms of Christianity *and* normally involves abstractive logic. With such translations, an intellectual matrix of theories is created, but this is not to say that these creations are innocent, as they can be shown to be used in political contexts (cf. Fitzgerald, 2007).

If we wish to pursue this thinking one step further, it is easy to characterise parts of activities in RS, both the practices themselves and the intellectual outcomes, as a kind of academic meta-religion, which entails that the distinction vis-à-vis academic theology with pronounced confessional features is blurred or it entirely disappears. This conclusion is by no means new. According to Fitzgerald (2000), RS should be described as a form of "ecumenical theology" (p. 7).

The consequences of this critical perspective for the science model are far reaching. As has been pointed out above, it is central to the science model that *learning about* should be understood as descriptive in contrast to, above all, *learning in*, which is about, simply put, indoctrination. This opposition can no longer be maintained; what we have instead is, generally speaking, two separate practices that are creative in nature, one of which is inspired by science and the other usually not.

The collapse of the concept of religion as an analytical category is accordingly, in drastic terms, the collapse of the science model as an intellectual platform for RE. Instead, this platform stands out as a seriously misleading ideological superstructure to RE. In a country like Sweden, where the science model has been a self-evident point of departure for RE, this means there is no longer a captain in the pilot house. The activity is carried on in schools by tradition, but its original intellectual underpinnings are invalid.

To avoid misunderstandings, it is important to point out that only a certain interpretation of the expression "learning about" has been rejected here as outmoded, an interpretation where "learning about" and "learning in" are elevated to an absolute plane, assuming a virtually metaphysical

role. Criticism of this binary pair of opposites does not mean that all forms of distance to a phenomenon or an area are rejected, merely that any such distance must be specified in relation to the issue at hand. What it means to "see something from the outside" thus needs to be treated case by case and can vary depending on the subject, for example, if it is a matter of history, philosophy or biology.

The situation for the knowledge model is somewhat different in comparison to the science model. This is owing to the fact that the knowledge model does not rest on, or need to rest on, the same binary thinking. Thus, the consequences for the knowledge model of the criticism of the concept of religion and closely related concepts are indeed complicating but do not have to be undermining. On the other hand, it should be made clear that the disintegration of the science model strengthens the need for a deeper and more elaborated knowledge model to serve as a new, sustainable platform for RE.

As discussed above, among the complications, we find the need for an altered and more critically oriented relation to RS, a greater (intradisciplinary) distance, where some form of selection is necessary. Theoretical concepts cannot be adopted wholesale; instead, their possible value for RE needs to be examined. Such selections entail in turn that the academic discussion of RE's knowledge content and concept formation needs to include a critical meta-platform—here research from critical religion can make contributions, as it can be said to have already done.

There are many indications that such an elaboration of the knowledge model would lead to an increased differentiation of the concept of science, a greater emphasis on the difference between (parts of) RS and science pursued in entirely different areas, which ought to be able to influence the future design of RE.

When the matter of selection arises, a natural follow-up question arises: what kind of alleged knowledge or concept formation needs to be handled with caution in RE? Because subdisciplines, like history of religion, have to some extent already incorporated the criticism of the concept of religion, this is probably not where a caution sign needs to be placed, even though the earlier pronouncement from Nongbri regarding the study of the ancient world points in a different direction. On the

other hand, as has been touched upon above, the historical background to the Western concept of religion still constitutes a blind spot in social scientific area:

> our current most commonly used social scientific categories, especially those defining "religion" and the "secular", have been deeply shaped by Western Protestant theological concepts and are still connected with unspoken assumptions about the constitution of the world and the meaning of history – assumptions that are empirically unverifiable and virtually theological. (Madsen, 2012, p. 26)

A rule of thumb might be that the more a subdiscipline in RS claims to make use of methods similar to those of natural science, the more there is reason to critically scrutinise the knowledge claims and treat them with caution. This is not motivated by any animosity towards natural science—as long as natural science remains natural science—but rather by the fact that the high level of generality in natural scientific theories is not transferrable to RS.

Why would such a rule of thumb be important? If RE becomes marinated in some form of scientism, for example, falls back on universal explanatory models that treat religion as a totality, it will not be possible to fulfil demands for an impartial approach. My impression—right or wrong—is that proponents of the science model, in their zeal to purge religious/confessional features from RE, have been considerably less concerned about the risk of winding up in the ditch on the other side of the road.

It may sound paradoxical, but to be intellectually acceptable, RE needs to be less "scientific" in the future.

Final Comments

Criticism similar to that levelled against the concept of religion can of course be turned against non-confessional RE as an idea and practice, namely that RE reflects a Western understanding of the concept of religion. In Swedish syllabuses, for example, the "world religion paradigm" is universally prevalent as far as I can determine. Research has already shown

that so-called essentialist thinking is present in Swedish teaching materials in RE (Hylén, 2012; Wiktorin, 2022).

What supports such an assessment is the observation that the world "secular" as an antonym to "religious" contains within itself the same understanding of religion as the Western concept of religion, albeit in negated form (cf. Fitzgerald, 2007). The consequence of this intimate relationship is that the secular—both as a concept and as a way of life—passes on a fundamental Christian pattern. If non-confessional RE is seen as an attempt to provide secular teaching on the subject of religion, then this attempt is still—at least indirectly—a passing on of Christian tradition, albeit in a watered-down form that, to an untrained eye, can be difficult to recognise as Christian.

To proponents of the science model, this type of cultural analysis presents substantial problems, because the model in its purest form includes the ambition to achieve a definitive break with the past, and in this sense assumes an observational approach. Thus, the model corresponds with what can be regarded as a defining feature of modernity, namely, the belief that such a break has actually taken place. Non-confessional RE, as it was first developed in Sweden, *is* a modern project.

For the knowledge model, which affirms the historicity of humans and knowledge, even though its proponents maintain at the same time that it is possible to lift yourself above it, the cultural framing that surrounds and is conveyed further by RE need not be an insurmountable problem. Nothing hinders the possibility of a knowledge that, within this inherited cultural framework, elevates itself over particular historical circumstances and individual experiences, as long as this "elevating" or "transcending" is not confounded with natural science, where general knowledge has a specific intra-scientific meaning.

In conclusion, I want to state that the fundamental philosophical problem in non-confessional RE is about how intellectual distance can be achieved to what is popularly called "religion"—how this distance should be more closely understood and realised. This problem is not specific to RE, but rather something that haunts the entire Enlightenment tradition and remains an unsolved question in what is usually loosely termed "Western culture." There has been a slow erosion of the platform for the critique of religion and theology that has been cultivated in the

Enlightenment tradition, which also includes the concept of intellectual distance to religion on which this critique was based. At the same time, it has come to light that the secular is burdened by considerable theological baggage that has merely been relegated to a cellar space to await a more meaningful and more precision-driven critique than modernity has been able to muster.

When both established religion and its opposite—the secular—lose their cultural moorings, and are no longer able to find support in the premises of modernity, a considerable amount of uncertainty is created. It is in this precarious situation that the quest to find a new intellectual platform for RE needs to seek its point of departure.

It could also be said: RE's most fundamental intellectual problems are not its own. On the other hand, RE offers a window, a peephole, through which can be observed the problem complex that is normally hidden from view in the culture. To wish to abolish non-confessional RE because RE is somehow not neutral, should anyone want to suggest as much after having been made aware of the criticism levelled against the concept of religion, would merely be an empty gesture. A tenable notion of the intellectual distance to what we used to call "religion" but in future should use another name for is missing in action not merely in RE, but in the entire cultural context that embeds the pursuit of such education.

On the other hand, the attempts to achieve clarity in the knowledge base for RE, which has been a leitmotif in this book, are not merely a contribution to the development of a particular school subject but also encompass the entire way of life that has evolved in the West and has been called, for a time, "secular."

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