Olof Franck *Editor*

Assessment in Ethics Education

A Case of National Tests in Religious Education

Springer

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Preface

The idea of publishing a book on this theme came up during the Association for Educational Assessment – Europe's conference on "International surveys, policy borrowing and national assessment" at the Sorbonne, Paris, on the 7th–9th of November 2013, where the book's editor Olof Franck and the then project leader for the Swedish national tests in RE, Annika Lindskog, presented a paper with the title "Constructing national tests in religious education: challenges concerning assessment and evaluation in relation to knowledge requirements applied to ethics and religious traditions".

I would like to thank the authors who contributed to this volume and also Annika Lindskog who initially contributed ideas regarding how a book on assessment in ethics education, with reference to the national tests in RE, could be developed.

Gothenburg, Sweden   Olof Franck

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Nigel Fancourt is a departmental lecturer at the University of Oxford's Department of Education, where he has worked since 2010. He studied theology (MA) and social anthropology (MSt) at Oxford, later completing a PGCE at Westminster College, and a part-time PhD in educational studies at Warwick. Previously he worked as a researcher at Warwick and as a teacher at Lord Williams's School in Thame; he had also qualified and worked as a lawyer for several years. His research explores how learners come to understand the conceptual frameworks of others, in two main areas: religions in education, especially dialogical perspectives on discourses in policy, pedagogy and assessment, and teacher education, especially how teachers engage with and use research in schools and classrooms. He is a member of the Oxford Centre for Sociocultural and Activity Theory Research and the Forum for Religion and Philosophy in Education.

Olof Franck is associate professor of philosophy of religion and senior lecturer in subject matter education in social studies at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, where he also is assistant head for research. He has been engaged as a subject expert by the Swedish National Agency for Education in the school reforms Lgr11 and Gy11 and in the project NIT (National IT strategies) with a focus on digital competence in Swedish policy documents for upper secondary school. He is the author of a range of articles and books relating to philosophy of religion, religious education, ethics education and issues regarding multicultural and gender perspectives on education. His main research focuses on various issues within ethics education, religious education and education for sustainable development. He is currently engaged in a research project financed by a grant from the Swedish Research Council 2015–2017: *What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school* (Dnr 2014–2030).

Kristoffer Larsson, who has a PhD in subject matter education, is a lecturer in subject matter education in social studies at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. His

research endeavours revolve mainly around critical thinking in relation to social studies. At the moment, he is heading the group constructing the Swedish national tests in religious education on behalf of the National Agency for Education. He is also engaged in a research project financed by a grant from the Swedish Research Council 2015–2018: *Rethinking Conflict: An investigation of how emerging conflicts can be utilized to promote learning* (Dnr 2014–2132). His main contribution to this project is his theoretical knowledge of the phenomenographic perspective on teaching and learning.

Annika Lilja has a PhD in pedagogical work. She has many years of experience as a teacher in the Swedish compulsory school. She has also been working with the national tests in religious education for some years. Her research interests include pedagogical relations, issues about values education and ethics education. Between 2015 and 2017, Annika Lilja will be engaged in the research project *What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school* (Dnr 2014–2030).

Christina Osbeck is associate professor of religious studies and senior lecturer in subject matter education in social studies at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, where she is also deputy head. She has a PhD from Karlstad University where she was also active until 2013. She has a degree in teaching social studies to children aged 10–16 years and practised for some years. She has also been working at the National Agency for Education in connection with evaluations and quality auditing of municipalities. Her research is focused on religious education, especially ethics and existential issues. She wrote her dissertation on pupils' life interpretations and how bullying works as a shaping and homogenising tool for life interpretations. Her major research projects thereafter have concerned bullying and RE knowledge as language – ethnographic work in how pupils expand their discursive repertoires about religions and life in relation to RE. Since she came to Gothenburg, she has also worked with national tests in RE and is the leader of the research project *What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school* (2015–2017), financed by the Swedish Research Council.

Karin Sporre, with a PhD in ethics from Lund University, Sweden, is professor in education focusing on values, gender and diversity at Umeå University, Sweden. Since 2001, she has been actively engaged in co-operation with South African colleagues which has inspired comparison between South Africa and Sweden, exemplified in some of the chapters in her book *In Search of Human Dignity* (2015). Her recent research also includes studies on gender and religion as well as value conflicts in Swedish schools. From 2015 to 2017, Karin Sporre is participating in the research project *What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school.* At Umeå University, she is leading a research group in Early Childhood Education and Care. With an interest in chil-

dren's existential ethical issues, Karin Sporre will in her next research project focus on children, sustainability and hope.

Julian Stern is professor of education and religion and dean of education and theology, at York St John University, York, UK, having previously worked in four other UK universities and as a school teacher in four schools. He has published widely with 13 monographs and numerous articles on religious education, spirituality, homework, solitude and loneliness and research methods. His recent books include *Virtuous Educational Research: Conversations on Ethical Practice* (Peter Lang, 2016) and *Loneliness and Solitude in Education: How to Value Individuality and Create an Enstatic School* (Peter Lang, 2014). He is general secretary of ISREV, the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (www.isrev.org).

Johan Tykesson earned his PhD in mathematical statistics at Chalmers University of Technology in 2008. He is now a university lecturer in mathematical statistics at the University of Gothenburg. His research focus is probability theory. Since the autumn of 2013, he has assisted IDPP in their statistical analyses of the results of the Swedish national tests in religious education.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Olof Franck

Abstract In this introduction, a background to the chapters' highlighting of the main issue, illustrated by the question *Does a concern for educational quality, exercised in the development of various kinds of assessment procedures, have to be opposed to or in conflict with a focus on existential and relational purposes in ethics education?*, is developed. The Swedish national curriculum for compulsory school, and the national tests in religious education, is introduced. Various paths for relevant research are presented and related to a focus on the contributions of *Assessment in Ethics Education – A Case of National Tests in Religious Education*. Specifically the research project of which this book is a part is described, and the issues treated in the chapters are, on a general level, contextualised with reference to international debates on ethics and assessment and ethics education.

Does a concern for educational quality, exercised in the development of various kinds of assessment procedures, have to be opposed to or in conflict with a focus on existential and relational purposes in ethics education? In one sense, one could say that the chapters in this book highlight exactly this question from various angles, based on research carried out in relevant contexts where, for example, analyses of policy documents, items in national tests, statistical analyses of test results and interviews with teachers and pupils are performed. It is also by exploring such a focus that the book may constitute a contribution to the vast amount of literature that is continuously being published in the field where issues on assessment in educational contexts are at the centre.

The research focus of the authors of this book is directed towards younger pupils studying in compulsory school and in particular the context in which national tests in RE are given. What kind of ethically relevant competences are prescribed and are expected to be developed in ethics education? Which competences are highlighted or more or less implicitly stated in relevant policy documents regulating teaching in

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schools? Which competences may be thought to be prioritised within national tests in RE, which includes ethics education, and which theoretical frameworks could be of relevance for analyses of such prioritizations?

1.1 Background

In the autumn of 2011, a new curriculum for compulsory school was introduced in Sweden.[1] The syllabuses of all subjects were given a uniform structure including the aim of the subject, abilities that pupils should be given opportunities to develop, core content and knowledge requirements. Two aspects of this structure in particular have, in RE, been the objects of discussion: (1) The *core content* of the syllabus presents the content that must be highlighted during the course in question. The teacher is free to decide in which order the various parts of this content are going to be dealt with and how comprehensive the treatment of them is going to be, as long as the teaching involves a fair and substantial application of the prescribed knowledge requirements. (2) These *knowledge requirements* are structured around a new marking scale where the highest mark is A and the lowest is F. This scale is designed to relate to the core contents of the subjects.

The Swedish National Agency for Education has, after the implementation, been organising the development of national tests in the social science subjects: geography, history, religious education (RE) and civics, as well as in physics, biology and chemistry, for grades 6 and 9 (ages 12 and 15). The tests in question are, like the equivalent tests in science, Swedish, English and mathematics, supposed to relate to the core content and the knowledge requirements presented in the relevant syllabuses included in the new curriculum, and they were carried out for the first time in the spring of 2013. Since 2016, national tests in the social science subjects are given only for grade 9.

The construction of the tests in RE is performed at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies at the University of Gothenburg. During the process, the project has initiated collaboration with various schools in order to take into account not only political and bureaucratic demands but also the experience and knowledge of professional teachers, when developing the tests.

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[1] Note that throughout this volume, curriculum has been used to translate the Swedish *läroplan*, which contains both general instructions and the syllabuses (*kursplaner*) for the individual subjects.

1.2 Paths for Research

The national tests in RE have since the start, for both year 6 and year 9, been divided into two parts. They consist of a mixture of formats: closed-ended items such as multiple-choice questions and, particularly regarding the parts that focus on ethical issues, open-ended items demanding essay-like answers. The items are intended to measure levels E, C and A in the grading scale.

Several possible paths for research could, naturally, be identified in relation to the empirical material that is available. One could be to focus upon results in the tests in relation to various constructions of items; another one could be to investigate pupils' answers considered as expressions of young people's views on ethics and existential questions, as well as on various conceptions about religion. A third approach for research could be directed towards the question of the degree to which the results of the tests can provide indications about how the teaching in the subject of RE is carried out in Swedish schools. A fourth could be concentrated around issues related to interpretations of how teachers perform assessment and how teachers identify different qualities in answers given by pupils.

There are, of course, many more examples that could be mentioned, but the four given above are, in fact, in terms of various conceptions and strategies, represented in the chapters in this book. It should, however, be emphasised that the empirical basis for research in several of the chapters is related to pedagogical and philosophical perspectives that have been found by the authors to be relevant when trying to interpret the results in a wider and more comprehensive way.

A variety of fundamentally challenging perspectives, brought to the fore by the national tests in RE, are presented and developed in this book. The focus is, naturally, directed towards the parts of the tests that represent the core content falling under the heading *Ethics*. It is well known that many teachers find those parts difficult to handle. Further, ethics is a field that presents a range of moral and existential issues that are not easily treated. Many of these issues may be said to belong to the philosophical context, where "eternal questions" are brought together and reflected upon.

The main aims of the Swedish national tests are to support equal and fair assessment and marking, along with the provision of data for an analysis of how the knowledge goals are fulfilled at school level as well as on a national level.[2]

A lot of challenges have been identified during the work – and new challenges will be met in the future. Some of them are related to the basic question of how to develop valid and reliable tests in a subject that could be said to touch upon profound existential questions. Others are related to considerations falling under the theory of assessment.

In *Assessment in Ethics Education – A Case of National Tests in Religious Education*, some specific challenges identified in relation to ethical issues involved in the national tests are examined. The structure of the book is intended to mirror

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[2] See Chap. 1.

questions and themes that may be of relevance – and of interest – to both researchers and teachers, not only in a Swedish context but also from an international perspective. In order to open up for broader approaches to the area *Assessment in Ethics Education*, two internationally well-known researchers, Nigel Fancourt and Julian Stern, have been invited to comment on the six chapters in this book written by Swedish authors. Fancourt and Stern have also been asked to present research questions and research approaches that they find relevant and important to highlight and develop. Their chapters present both possibilities and challenges relating to such questions and approaches in an international research context.

1.2.1   Scope and Relevance of This Book

The following chapters, and especially the first six, focus directly on a Swedish context in relation to which issues about assessment in ethics education are raised and examined. This does not mean that it is claimed that the questions that are treated are unique to a Swedish educational arena. Although national tests in RE may be rare, testing procedures regarding ethics education are not. We are all living in times where assessment and measurability have come into focus in ways that are quite astonishing – and demanding. Sometimes it almost seems that a view according to which only those thoughts and actions that are measurable according to some apparently strict criteria is considered important: in school, in education and in society outside of educational contexts. This also seems to hold for areas where ethics and ethics education are in focus.

Several of the perspectives presented in this book may be seen as constituting paths for the development of critical perspectives on assessment in ethics education – and not only in a Swedish context. On a general level, these tracks relate to national and international approaches according to which the present-day focus on measurement in education is one-sided, rigidly concentrating on measurable outcomes of teaching-learning processes, rather than examining these *processes* as worthy of being objects of constructive analysis. Such a critical stance does not necessarily lead to a complete rejection of the idea of testing pupils' competences or abilities or knowledge within ethics education. Someone may want to argue that the form or the criteria or the content in the testing procedures is misguided or more or less unreliable, while not being prepared to oppose to the idea that RE and ethics, like other subjects, should involve some kind of assessment.

One voice in the ongoing discussion about education and measurability is Gert Biesta, who in several publications has examined issues regarding teaching-learning processes, assessment and aims for quality development. Biesta presents critical perspectives on epistemological, pedagogical and existential dimensions of the relational arenas where students and teachers collaborate in educational communication, but he is also careful to point out that there are intentions and goals in today's focus on testing, professionalism and quality that have to be acknowledged in order to understand what is going on.

In "The future of teacher education: Evidence, competence or wisdom?",

Biesta elaborates on "the fact that education always needs to engage with questions of purpose, content and relationships" and the requirement for teachers to be "able to make situated judgements about what is educationally desirable", an ability which neither could nor should be "replaced by scientific evidence" (Biesta 2012, 8).

Biesta's approach seems relevant to the theme of the present volume. Education could be developed in different ways in accordance with a variety of approaches, but what seems to be common to them all is that "questions of purpose, content and relationships" are fundamental, building a platform for pedagogical and existential communication about norms and values, right and wrong and good and evil, which requires that teachers are able to make judgements regarding educational desirability. On the other hand, a concern for the quality of education is certainly vividly present, not only among policy-makers but also among teachers, pupils and parents. This seems to be one main reason for the development of national tests and also for the level of concern and commitment among those who are directly involved in putting the tests into practice.

1.3   Contributions on a Subject Level

The national tests in RE were, as has been mentioned, given for the first time in 2013. This means that research carried out with a focus on the tests, for example, along the paths presented above, is in its early stages. One article on the subject already published, in addition to the work developed in this book, is Osbeck et al. (2015). Research will, however, develop further in the near future – and one main project is *What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School*, financed by the Swedish Research Council (Dnr 2014–2030) and taking place during the period 2015–2017. Five of the researchers who have contributed to the work presented in this volume are engaged in this project: Christina Osbeck (project leader), Olof Franck, Annika Lilja, Karin Sporre and Johan Tykesson.[3]

The research presented in the chapters written by these authors has been developed within the project mentioned and is a part of it.

This project started in 2015, and the research questions that are in focus have influenced the development of several approaches and perspectives with reference to a wide spectrum of issues.[4] Being at this stage in the process also means that investigations and studies are at present developing along various lines that seem to be relevant, interesting and valuable. A range of research questions are being collected, analysed and systematised, and continuous discussions regarding these are taking place with reference to various intentions and goals within the research

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[3] http://idpp.gu.se/english/Research/research_projects/what-may-be-learnt-in-ethics

[4] In the "Concluding Remarks" in this volume, the structure and content of the project are presented with reference to forthcoming research.

team. Some of the results of the research so far have been presented at conferences, in symposiums and as papers, such as NoFa in Helsinki (2015),[5] ECER in Budapest (2015)[6] and in Dublin (2016),[7] NERA in Helsinki (2016)[8] and ISREV in Chicago (2016),[9] as well as in articles that are at present submitted or are in preparation.

One important starting point for the project mentioned has been an identification of a need to examine how general perspectives on assessment in educational contexts may be applied to ethics education in particular.

Although the literature on assessment and education in general is rich and comprehensive, there is a need to highlight present-day research on assessment of ethical competences within ethics education, non-confessional as well as denominational. In the present volume, perspectives on ethically relevant competences, assessment and ethics education are elaborated with reference to the national tests in RE, where ethics in the Swedish context is one of the main areas of content. The aim is to present not only results from analyses made with regard to the tests but also methodological approaches which could be relevant and fruitful within research on assessment in ethics education in general. The implementation of national tests where ethics is included as one area for the prescribed assessment procedures was one main reason for initiating the work with the analyses presented in this volume, as well as the research project mentioned. What has been explored and developed in the analyses and in the project has, however, relevance far beyond the limited context of these tests.

1.4   Ethics Education

"Ethics education" is in the present context used as a general label for education about ethical issues and questions. This label is certainly not the only one to be used in educational contexts. "Moral education", "character education" and "values education" are just some alternatives.

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[5] What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School. Olof Franck, Annika Lilja, Annika Lindskog, Christina Osbeck, Karin Sporre et al. The 5th NoFa Conference (Nordisk Fagdidaktisk konferens), Helsinki, Finland, 27–29 May.

[6] What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School. Olof Franck, Annika Lilja http://www.eera-ecer.de/ecer programmes/conference/20/contribution/34085/The European Conference on Educational Research, (ECER), Budapest 7–11/9 2015 Education and Transition – Contributions from Educational Research15.

[7] Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence Displayed in Pupils' Responses to National Tests in Ethics. Christina Osbeck, Olof Franck, Annika Lilja, Karin Sporre. ECER Dublin 2016-08-23 – 2016-08-26, Symposium: Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence Displayed in Pupils' Responses to National Tests in Ethics.

[8] What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School. Christina Osbeck, Olof Franck, Annika Lilja, Karin Sporre, Johan Tykesson. The 44th NERA Conference, 9–11 March, Helsinki.

[9] Values as part of pupils' ethical competence. Christina Osbeck (keynote lecture); Ethical competences – comparisons between a few countries. Olof Franck and Karin Sporre: Symposium 4. International Seminar on Religious Education and Values, Session XX, University of St. Mary on the Lake, Chicago July 31st to August 5th 2016.

I will not go into further analyses of these labels, their specific qualities and common characteristics: some discussions about this are to be found in a couple of the chapters in this book. I would, however, like to emphasise two things. First, the way one chooses to describe education about ethics will imply certain conceptions of what ethics is, and ought to be, about in educational contexts. "Moral education" may refer to a normative education where the ability to formulate, defend and criticise ethical positions and standpoints is in focus, while "character education" seems to imply a conception according to which participants, that is to say, the pupils, are to be taught in line with certain norms and values. Even though there is a certain vagueness associated with the label "values education", it often seems to be used to signify a broader, perhaps more analytically focused concept. Of course, such a conception may be misguided – and I believe that there are reasons for assuming that this is often the case – but it expresses at least an intention that seems to differ from the other two.

Regardless of which label one chooses, it seems to be relevant to discuss assessment and measurability in relation to the various alternatives – and interesting differences may very well appear between them regarding what is thought to be possible and desirable to assess within the education in question.

Ethics education is, under one label or another, performed in school systems all over the world. This means that questions regarding the development of what may be described as "ethical competence" within such an education do have international relevance.

As was stated before, there seem to be a limited number of international publications where assessment in ethics education that focuses on conceptions of ethical competence is emphasised. There are certainly articles, especially some recently published, which present important contributions to the field. But there is a need for more voices to be heard, not least in order to carry out more thorough investigations regarding aims, forms and contents in ethics education where a search for explicit and implicit conceptions of ethical competences is guiding the analyses.

Publications like the ones mentioned constitute interesting recent contributions to the field of assessment in ethics education. Still, more voices have to be heard in order to develop critical and constructive approaches to the field, in research as well as in teaching. The present volume is intended to be one way of meeting this need. It is also important to emphasise that ongoing analyses of how conceptions of ethical competence are expressed and described in national and international policy documents – syllabuses, curricula, supranational documents – will contribute to research as well as to the development of educational strategies regarding ethics education.

Discussions are going on in many countries about what kind of competences may be thought to be ethically relevant, about criteria for assessment and about a need to focus on existential and personal dimensions of education about ethics. Within the project Religious Education at Schools in Europe (REL-EDU),[10] recent research regarding RE, including ethics education, has been presented in six vol-

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[10] http://www.rel-edu.eu/

umes. In some countries, ethics education is primarily included in RE, while some countries offer secular education about ethics. Both alternatives may give rise to discussions about how to develop an education where ethical competences are highlighted and about which conceptions of ethics and ethics education are implied by various possible approaches.

In the ongoing research project about ethical competence (*What may be learnt in ethics?*), policy documents from the Nordic countries, and from some African, American and Canadian national school systems, are examined and analysed with a focus on how conceptions of ethical competence are described and expressed. The chapters in this book are relevant to an understanding of how such investigations may be developed. The common starting point for the analyses in the chapters is the national tests in RE, which includes ethics education, in Sweden. But these analyses may be said to point further than the limits of the Swedish context. The research questions, the methodologies used and the results presented can all contribute to nationally as well as internationally focused analyses of assessment in ethics education, framed with reference to explicit and implicit conceptions of ethical competence.

Having said this, it should be emphasised that the chapters in this volume must not be interpreted as representing one common research approach with regard to the items concerning ethics in the national tests in RE. Rather, the authors represent different approaches and interests, starting their analyses from various theoretical premises. I view this plurality as a strength of this volume, given that a variety of research questions, methods and approaches are highlighted, together contributing to a multifaceted analytical approach where generous space is made for formulations and reformulations, regarding how to deal with challenges arising from the parts of the national tests relating to ethics.

The fact that the authors of the different chapters treat questions in the tests from various angles, interpreting them in different ways and drawing conclusions that sometimes may, and sometimes may not, coincide, introduces the possibility of taking the research process further, not least in the ongoing research project mentioned above. I will, in the "Concluding Remarks" in this book, return to the question of how to develop research with regard to the future, not only in reference to a Swedish context but also in relation to international perspectives.

1.5   Content

This volume is structured in a way that is thought to mirror various research issues relating to the national tests in RE.

The second chapter, written by Olof Franck, is titled "Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence and the Search for Strategies for Assessment in Ethics Education: A Critical Analysis". Here various conceptions of *ethical competence* are highlighted with the aim of presenting a more or less comprehensive analysis of fundamental importance for developing the national tests. The chapter starts with an

introduction where the Swedish curricula of 2011 are presented. The structure and the content of the syllabus for RE in compulsory school are analysed with reference to an interpretation of the concept of ethical competence, where six competences that may contribute to the meaning of the concept in question are identified. The results of this analysis are used as a basis for a critical interpretation of how "ethical competence", mostly in an implicit way, is understood in the national tests. This interpretation is elaborated with regard to some perspectives within the virtue and capability approach presented by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The chapter ends with some suggestions for developing the items in the tests regarding ethics, in order to take into account a more complex interpretation of ethical competence and to make this interpretation transparent to pupils and teachers.

In the third chapter of the book, another fundamental concept is analysed, namely, that of *critical thinking*. Kristoffer Larsson analyses, under the title "Critical thinking in students' ethical reasoning: A reflection on some examples from the Swedish national tests in religious education", how critical thinking is manifested in answers to questions in the RE national test for year 9, and special focus is directed towards variations in these answers. Larsson's theoretical point of departure is Daniel Lee's non-confessional approach to ethics and Robert Ennis' definition of critical thinking. The aim of the analysis is to describe and discuss some critical-thinking skills that are identified and the variations in their manifestations. The chapter ends with a discussion about whether aspects of critical thinking could be a feasible focus point when assessing pupils' ethical reasoning in the national tests.

The fourth and fifth chapters present studies regarding teachers' and pupils' respective ways of approaching the items regarding ethics in the national tests. Chapter 4 has the title "Teachers' Experiences of Ethics in Religious Education", and it is written by Annika Lilja. Lilja starts her analysis by focusing on the fact that ethics gets limited attention within RE teacher education, and she remarks that this, among other things, makes it interesting to investigate how the national tests in RE and the parts of them relating to ethics may influence the teachers' conceptions of ethics and ethics education. Focusing on a possible disharmony between the syllabus's apparent sanctioning of the aim of giving pupils knowledge about moral codes that are perceived as right and praiseworthy and the overall goal of bringing up citizens who are critical and able to think creatively and outside the box, Lilja goes on to present the results from a study where seven teachers in the Swedish elementary school, teaching RE in grade 9, have been interviewed about their teaching in ethics. The aim of the chapter is to describe how they talk about ethics as a part of RE and about what the national tests have meant for their teaching in ethics and for their assessment of pupils' abilities in ethics.

In Chap. 5, Christina Osbeck turns to issues relating to pupils' answers to questions regarding ethics in the tests. More specifically, she presents and discusses various conceptions of ethical competence with regard to a sample of pupils' writings about the ethical concept *forgiveness* in one of the tests. Under the title "Ethical competence in pupils' texts – Existential understandings and ethical insights as central but tacit in the curriculum", Osbeck examines the suggestion from previous research concerning ethical insights as a potentially central ethical sub-competence

that is present in pupils' responses but, at the same time, as a sub-competence that is absent from the curriculum and the national tests. What could *ethical insights* mean – and how could they relate to ethical competence? Osbeck elaborates on this question with reference to Martha Nussbaum's virtue and capability approaches, focusing on ethical insights in relation to the place of emotions and the concepts of *eudaimonia* and *deliberative fantasia*. She then carries out an analysis of 50 pupils' responses to an item regarding forgiveness, aiming to identify what conceptions of ethical competence are implicated. The chapter ends with a discussion regarding how the empirical results could be dealt with and interpreted with regard to the philosophical analysis previously presented and what pedagogical implications can be said to follow.

Chapter 6 is written by Karin Sporre under the title "Global Responsibilities and Ethics Education: To Be Assessed and If So How?". Her analysis starts with the statement that issues regarding environmental perspectives, sustainable development and international perspectives are explicitly mentioned in the Swedish curriculum for the compulsory school grades 1–9, at the same time as an ethical perspective is described as providing a basis for the pupils' ability to form their own standpoint. Sporre notices that these formulations are to be seen as being in accordance with the current emphasis on the importance of issues regarding global responsibility but points out that the implicit normativity in that kind of agenda for education gives rise to critical questions, for example, when it comes to promoting pupils' ability to think critically, in freedom and with integrity. She also notices that there is another question to be dealt with, namely, what content is in fact included in an education focusing on global responsibility and how this content is related to a promotion of adequate ethical competence. In her analysis, focusing on the educational policy reflected in the Swedish curriculum Lgr11 and evaluated in the national tests of 2013 and relating this to educational research and theoretical discussions of ethics, she evaluates the tests from 2013 and identifies further aspects to be assessed. One result from the analysis is that global responsibility forms a significant part of the initial parts of the curriculum, but thereafter it is mentioned only to quite a limited extent in the syllabus for religious education, and that it is not tested as an ethical competence in the national tests of 2013. One question that, according to Sporre, has to be dealt with is consequently how an integration between approaches may be achieved for the development of a more complex understanding of ethical competence, its use and its adequate assessment.

Chapter 7 of this book, "Differential Item Functioning in the National Tests in Religious Education in Sweden", written by Johan Tykesson, has its focus directed towards statistical issues arising from the items relating to ethics in the national tests in RE. More precisely, Tykesson carries out an analysis of a particular statistical aspect of the national tests, namely, that of differential item functioning (DIF), applied to the ethical items in the tests. The chapter begins with a presentation of the tests with special regard to statistical perspectives, and Tykesson comments upon both structure and content in the tests for years 6 and 9. He proceeds by introducing the Mantel-Haenszel method and then goes on to apply this method to the ethical items in the tests in order to analyse the material with a focus on DIF. He gives the

following informal explanation about what is going on here by stating that "An item is said to exhibit DIF between two groups of students if there is some level of ability, such that the distribution of scores on the item is different for students from one group than for students from the other group at this level of ability". The results presented at the end of the chapter introduce some interesting perspectives and challenges relating to the questions of whether the tests could be said to favour one gender over the other and whether they disfavour pupils who are second-language speakers of Swedish.

In Chap. 8, Nigel Fancourt "presents an outsider's perspective" on the questions and approaches highlighted in the six chapters written by Swedish contributors. With reference to wider global policy tensions, he opens up for a broader analysis of the main threads within a Swedish context, and he highlights challenges relating to demands for effective assessment in education, demands created with regard to neo-liberal ideas. Fancourt discusses such assessment strategy with regard to areas of religious education and ethics, and he considers the principle of constructive alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The conclusion of this discussion has important consequences, for example, with regard to how various strategies for approaching the research area of assessment are developed in relation to policy-making and curriculum planning.

Finally, in Chap. 9, Julian Stern widens the scope of the theme of this book, by focusing on ethical questions not only in relation to the assessment area but also with regard to issues concerning the purposes of schooling and of performativity in school. What is ethics education? How may such education be performed and developed? What is the ethical significance of assessment within ethics education? Questions like these are analysed with regard to three case studies on assessment feedback in the UK and the USA. The assessment processes are highlighted with reference to considerations of relevant personal, dialogic and creative opportunities.

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Chapter 2
Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence and the Search for Strategies for Assessment in Ethics Education: A Critical Analysis

Olof Franck

Abstract Various conceptions of *ethical competence* are highlighted in this chapter with the aim of presenting a more or less comprehensive analysis of fundamental importance for developing the national tests in RE in Sweden. The chapter starts with an introduction where the Swedish curricula of 2011 are presented. The structure and the content of the syllabus for RE in compulsory school are analysed with reference to an interpretation of the concept of ethical competence that identifies six competences that may contribute to the meaning of the concept in question. The results of this analysis are used as a basis for a critical interpretation of how "ethical competence", mostly in an implicit way, is understood in the national tests. This interpretation is developed with regard to some perspectives within the virtue and capability approach presented by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The chapter ends with some suggestions for developing the items on the national tests regarding ethics, in order to take into account a more complex interpretation of ethical competence and to make this interpretation transparent to pupils and teachers.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, with regard to the content on ethics in the national curriculum[1] for compulsory school, and especially the syllabus for religious education (RE), I will highlight various conceptions of *ethical competence*, with the aim of presenting a more or less comprehensive analysis of fundamental importance for constructing the national tests in the subject. I will show that the concept of ethics as it is used

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[1] The Swedish *läroplan* is translated here as curriculum. The curriculum contains both general instructions and the syllabuses [*kursplaner*] for the individual subjects.

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within the syllabus is vague and that this leads not only to theoretical obstacles but also as a consequence, to interpretive challenges that seem to threaten the idea of ethics education as a unified and unequivocal concept.[2]

There are, in fact, in the RE syllabus, several different conceptions of what ethics education is and should be, with the consequence that room is also made for various conceptions of ethical competence, that is to say of the ability or the skill that, according to the policy documents, is to be developed through education. This leads to several challenges regarding the interpretation of the aim of ethics education on a range of levels, of which the national tests in RE constitute one, since one of the themes in these tests falls under the heading *Ethics*.

In order to develop a strategy for coming to terms with these challenges, this chapter will provide a critical analysis of the concept of ethical competence as it appears in the syllabus, with reference to a couple of philosophical perspectives. The discussion will refer to certain ideas from the works of Martha Nussbaum. The analysis will include a suggestion for how to develop the concept of ethical competence in the light of the challenges mentioned, and this will be related to the implementation of national tests in RE, where some of the items fall under the syllabus's core content *Ethics*, and to the concept of values education in a Swedish context.

Before turning to a brief review of the content on ethics in the syllabus, it is important to say something about the formal background to the school reforms for compulsory school and for upper secondary school of 2011, and it will be relevant to introduce two of the fundamental concepts – core content and knowledge requirements – that will be used in the analysis.

2.2 Background: The Swedish School Reforms

In the new curricula for compulsory and upper secondary school in Sweden implemented in 2011, two fundamental concepts relating to all subjects were introduced. The first is the *core content* of a syllabus, which presents the content that it is obligatory for teachers to highlight during the course in question. The teacher is free to decide the order in which the various parts of this content are to be dealt with and how comprehensive the treatment of them is to be. The second concept is the *knowledge requirements*, which are structured around a new marking scale where the highest mark is A and the lowest is F. This scale is designed to relate to the core contents of the subjects.

What reasons were there for introducing these concepts? The main aim for using them to categorise important parts of a syllabus was to give a transparent structure for dealing with the questions: *What is to be taught within various subjects? With*

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[2]The author of this chapter has formerly been engaged as a subject expert in the school reform Lgr11, where the RE syllabus for compulsory school was developed, and in the work with constructing national tests in RE. The argument in this chapter may, at least partly, be seen as being presented in critical retrospect.

reference to which criteria are pupils' achievements to be assessed? The background to the structure of the reform for compulsory school in 2011 was an inquiry, commissioned by the Swedish government, which stated the following regarding the aim and intention of the inquiry:

> The purpose of the Inquiry on Objectives and Follow Up in Compulsory School is to create the conditions for better results by making the role of school clearer in response to, among other things, the difficulties in implementing today's goal system, with its goals to aim for and goals to attain. One way of improving the results of compulsory schools is to state, early on in compulsory school, the achievement requirements that pupils need to fulfil. (SOU 2007:28, 27)

A similar description was to be found in another governmental inquiry, which outlined the aims and intended structure of the reform for upper secondary school:

> Upper secondary school subjects shall, as they are today, be made up of courses. They shall however, in a clearer way, build on compulsory school subjects and continue from where compulsory school left off. This means that certain repetition elements in today's general courses should be replaced by in-depth studies in the subject at upper secondary level…I propose that subjects and courses shall be described more clearly than they are today. The aim of this added clarity is to strengthen equity. (SOU 2008:27, 64)

This inquiry also makes a statement regarding the preservation of the existing system of grades:

> I propose that the system with course grades be maintained. My argument in favour of this is that there must be very good reasons for a change from the current system to subject grades and I haven't found any such reasons during my work…Course grades work much better in upper-secondary adult education and I see it as a major advantage to have the same grading system. (ibid)

It is worth noting that both inquiries stress the need for clarity regarding both how the teaching should be structured and the formulation of and use of "achievement requirements" or grades and that the reasons given in the inquiries refer to a need, not only on the part of the teachers but also, and presumably particularly, on the part of the pupils.

As may be seen, the aims and intentions in the inquiries express demands that, in a rather explicit way, justify the inclusion of the concepts of *core content* and *knowledge requirements* in the syllabus. The lines of reasoning are parallel in both inquiries with regard to the need for clarification within both compulsory school and upper secondary school. Assuming for the moment that the subject structure and the grade system today satisfy these needs, it should be noted that this is not only related to the introduction of the concepts in question but also to the fact that, as a consequence of this introduction, the teaching is more progressive, in the sense that what is dealt with within a course in a specific subject is to be seen as a step in the further knowledge development of a pupil in subsequent years in compulsory school and, later on, upper secondary school.

What is taught in ethics at one particular stage is consequently not only of importance as an independent part of the core content. It is also to be seen as a step in ethics education, which is necessary to take if a progressive knowledge is to be

developed. This is something to be remembered when critical perspectives are directed towards specific sections of the syllabus. A criticism might very well be directed towards a specific part of the core content for a subject, or towards one or another of the formulations in the knowledge requirements, say for year 6 or year 9, but it will probably, in one way or another, be relevant to keep this criticism in mind when corresponding parts referring to other ages are interpreted and discussed.

2.3   Fundamentals of the Critical Approach Presented in This Chapter

In this chapter, I will focus the analysis on ethics in the core content and the knowledge requirements for year 6 and 9 in the syllabus for RE in compulsory school. This focus is in line with the fact that national tests in RE have been given for these years.[3] What will be said in the following is, however, of relevance also to the corresponding core content in RE for year 3 (although the knowledge requirement there are less specific and detailed) and to the core content and the knowledge requirements prescribed for the RE courses in upper secondary school.

The syllabus structure of RE in the reform for compulsory school has, as I mentioned before, been the object of critical discussion (Selander 2011; Björlin 2011). My aim in the present context is not, however, to go into the debate about general issues, regarding, for example, whether "equity" has been strengthened thanks to the reformed structure in the new syllabus or how the system of grades may be evaluated. The approach chosen in this chapter has, however, some affinities with the general criticism that has been put forward from time to time. More specifically, I share a scepticism with some of the critics regarding the proposed aims behind the school reform. In spite of the intentions to make the curriculum more transparent and "clarified", it seems doubtful whether this has really been the result of the reform process. If one is going to succeed with such intentions, one has to do much more than introducing new categorisations of the content to be taught within different subjects. There are, in fact, as I see it, lots of vague and unclear formulations in the policy documents.

Secondly, and more seriously, a structure of the kind that now characterises the reformed syllabus, where the lines between core content and knowledge requirement are very strict, tends to suggest that the relation between education and assessment of pupils' achievements is more or less mechanical. According to one way of interpreting the core contents of the various syllabuses, the objectives seem to be formulated and ordered in a very formal and rigid way. This is one critical viewpoint that has been presented with reference to the syllabus for RE (cf.; Selander 2011).

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[3] National tests for year 6 were given from 2013 to 2015.

There is, I believe, some support to be found for this criticism, if one studies the structure of the syllabus in RE. According to my view, this is, however, not the primary difficulty with the syllabus structure for the subject in question. As I will show later on, the core content may be interpreted in a more multifaceted way where room is made for a relatively rich and nuanced understanding of the objectives of RE.

The main problem is, according to the standpoint I wish to put forward here, not the core content but the formulation of the knowledge requirements. Later in this chapter, I will show how specific "quality words" [*kvalitetsord*] in the requirements in question are used to differentiate between the various grades A–F, and I will argue that this usage creates and inspires a very formalistic way of interpreting the concept of knowledge. The general criticism against the new syllabus structure is also relevant when it comes to the wording of the syllabus for RE.

Third, as I am going to try to establish, this risk of limiting the concept of knowledge is especially threatening when it comes to the objectives of ethics. If these objectives are formalised in an impersonal way and if the relevant knowledge requirements are stated according to a more or less mechanical structure where specific, bureaucratic terms – or "quality words" – are prescribed to capture the core of what the concepts of *ethical knowledge* and *ethical competence* are thought to mean and refer to, then ethics education in compulsory school will soon move away from the area of substantial ethics, transforming this discipline into something supposedly "objective", quantitatively measurable and more or less free from personal and existential dimensions. One main conclusion from the discussion in this chapter will, however, be that the risk of limiting the concept of knowledge may in practice be counteracted by the fact that assessment procedure, in accordance with the knowledge requirements, seems to rest upon two different kinds of consideration: Do the pupils' achievements satisfy the formal criteria presented in the requirements, and to what extent do they satisfy the moral demands embedded in the existential and ethical context within which these criteria are applied?

I am not going to make the case any further here for these three main aspects of the approach used in this chapter. I want, however, to be open about my conviction that all of them, and in particular the last one, reveal serious obstacles regarding the possibility of developing a viable and nuanced ethics education and carrying out the assessment procedures connected to the knowledge requirements in a way that makes room for reflection, creativity, critical argument and personal development in relation to different existential dimensions.

2.4   The Aim of Ethics Education in the RE Syllabus

Each syllabus for compulsory school starts with a presentation of the aim of teaching the subject, a presentation that ends with a list of the "abilities" that the teaching "should essentially give pupils the opportunities to develop". In the aim given for RE, some specific formulations regarding ethics should be noted.

The teaching in the subject should, as it is stated in the *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool and the recreation centre 2011* (Lgr11*)*:

encourage pupils to reflect over various issues concerning life, their identity and their ethical attitudes. In this way, teaching should create the conditions for pupils to develop a personal attitude to life and an understanding of how they and others are thinking and living. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 176)

Furthermore, it should:

help pupils to develop their knowledge of how different religions and other outlooks on life view questions concerning gender, gender equality, sexuality and relationships. Pupils should, in addition, be equipped to analyse and determine their standpoint in ethical and moral questions. Teaching should also contribute to pupils developing an understanding of how people's values are linked to religions and other outlooks on life. It should also contribute to pupils developing their capacity to act responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings. (Lgr11, 176)

The word "religions" refers primarily to what in the syllabus are called "world religions" (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 178) – Christianity (which is particularly in focus), Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism but also "new religious movements" (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 179).

The special focus on Christianity, given in the aim of the subject, is very relevant for the present purpose and is expressed as follows:

Teaching should provide knowledge about an understanding of how Christian traditions have affected Swedish society and its values. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 176)

I will return to this last paragraph in a later section of this chapter.

What kind of picture concerning ethical competence can be seen in the text presenting the aim of the subject RE? Which abilities and which achievements are highlighted there?

What seems to be in focus is an intention to encourage a way of teaching where a variety of religious and non-religious outlooks, representing different viewpoints and approaches regarding fundamental ethical issues, are studied and made the objects of reflection. Pupils have to be provided with the appropriate conditions to develop a personal attitude to these issues and tools for analysing their standpoints on matters regarding ethics and values. No formal restrictions are presented where it is prescribed that the teaching should take this or that specific route when it comes to expressing such standpoints.

It seems that there are at least four competences that teaching should aim at developing: the competence for personal reflection with reference to ethical issues, the competence for developing personal attitudes and shaping personal standpoints in relation to such issues, the competence for the analysis and application of "ethical models" and relevant theoretical frameworks and the competence for acting responsibly in relation to oneself and one's surroundings, presumably given the processes and outcomes connected to the former competences.

Let us label these competences "reflective competence", "normative competence", "analytical competence" and "action competence". Reflective competence and analytical competence seem to correspond to two "abilities" that pupils "should essentially" be given opportunities to develop, namely, the ability to:

- Reflect over life issues and their own and other's identity
- Reason and discuss moral issues and values based on ethical concepts and models (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 176)

The competences for developing personal attitudes and shaping personal standpoints in relation to ethical issues, and to act responsibly in relation to oneself and one's surroundings, do not correspond to any of the abilities presented in the aim of the syllabus. They seem to be apprehended as kinds of moral capacity. At the same time, the explanations given, and in particular the one regarding action competence, "to act responsibly in relation to oneself and one's surroundings", seem in fact to be quite vague. How is this use of the concept of responsibility to be understood in this context? And what, in more specific terms, does it mean to talk about pupils having such a responsibility in relation to "themselves" and "their surroundings"? I will return to these questions when analysing the variety of conceptions of ethical competence found in the syllabus.

2.5   Core Content: Ethics

Now let us turn to the core content of ethics in RE for year 6 and 9, respectively! As I mentioned in an earlier section, I believe that the critical arguments directed towards these parts of the core content are going a little too far, interpreting their structure in a rather rigid way. I see no problems with the syllabus prescribing which issues are to be taught within the various steps in the education process that seems to be inevitable if one accepts the idea of a syllabus in a given school system. Naturally such issues have to be the objects of interpretation according to subject matter or methodological and pedagogical considerations, but this seems to be elementary. Of course the choice of specific content could be challenged and criticised, but looking at the content relating to ethical issues in the syllabus for RE for compulsory school, it seems to me to be both rather conventional and theoretically motivated.

In year 1–3, the pupils study themes relating to:

- Life issues of importance for pupils, such as good and evil, right and wrong, friendship, gender roles, gender equality and relationships
- Norms and rules in pupils' living environments, such as in school and sports contexts (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 177)

As a stage in their development, in year 4–6, pupils are to focus on the following points under the heading "Ethics":

- Some ethical concepts, such as right and wrong, equality and solidarity
- Daily moral questions concerning the identities, roles of girls and boys, gender equality, sexuality, sexual orientation and exclusion and violation of rights
- Questions about what a good life can be and what it may mean to do good (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 179)

Three things have to be noted here. First the ability to understand and use what are called "ethical concepts" may be related to all four kinds of competence that were mentioned earlier but especially to the first and the third. In order to reflect upon ethical issues and to perform ethical analysis, this ability is required, if the reflection and the analysis are to involve broader and deeper dimensions, that is to say perspectives that express and give rise to approaches that reach beyond a strictly private sphere. This means that here we have identified a fifth kind of competence that seems to be included in what the syllabus is presenting and prescribing regarding ethical competence.

Second, it is worth emphasising that the issues included in the list above are of various kinds: "daily moral questions" are mentioned along with complicated issues concerning gender and sexuality. This means that what is prescribed as being necessary to highlight in ethics education for year 4–6 is broad and requires both relevant knowledge and sensitivity from the teachers.

Third, as can be seen from the last point in the quotation above, virtue ethics is prioritised in the syllabus. We will soon see the same sort of formulation when we look at the core content for year 7–9 – and the same holds for the syllabus for RE in upper secondary school. The reason for this prioritisation is explicitly presented in the commentary to the syllabus, which was produced by the Swedish National Agency for Education:

> The place of ethics in the core content should make room and give time for the pupils to reflect upon and discuss questions about what is important in life and what is worth striving for…Virtue ethics…is a kind of ethics which builds upon the apprehension that situations where people have to make choices are so complicated that simple principles do not give enough of moral guidance for action. Instead of searching for answers about which actions are right or wrong in different situations virtue ethics emphasises how we should be as humans. It stresses that each human have a capacity for fulfilling the good life for herself and for others. (Skolverket 2011, 29)

Virtue ethics is highlighted here, not only as part of the core content to be studied within the teaching of ethics in RE but as an ethical ideal representing a more or less uncontroversial way of elaborating on ethical issues, providing a basis for a way of approaching these issues that may perhaps allow them to be taken further than would have been the case if normative ethics were in focus. This will be of interest for the forthcoming discussion regarding conceptions of ethical competence identifiable in the RE syllabus.

Now, what about the core content in ethics for year 7–9? The following content is included under the heading "Ethics":

- Daily moral dilemmas. Analysis and argumentation based on ethical models, such as consequential and deontological ethics.
- Views of the good life and the good person are linked to different kinds of ethical reasoning, such as virtue ethics.
- Ethical questions and the view of people in some religions and other outlooks on life.

- Ethical concepts which can be linked to questions concerning sustainable development, human rights and democratic values, such as freedom and responsibility. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 178)

In what way are these points related to the ones included in the core content for year 4–6? Are they to be interpreted in the same way as was described above with regard to how ethical competence is expressed in the syllabus, or are there other possibilities for how they may be interpreted?

As may be seen, at least three of the competences mentioned earlier also seem to be represented in this context. *Conceptual competence* with regard to ethically relevant contexts seems to be in focus in the last point in the paragraph above. *Reflective competence* seems to be linked to the content described in terms of "Ethical questions and the view of people in some religions and other outlooks on life". *Analytical competence* seems to be indicated in the description of how "different kinds of ethical reasoning" are to be connected to "views of the good life and the good person", in the way "argumentation" is presented, and it is also linked to the understanding and application of "ethical models". The second and the fifth kinds of competence, *normative competence* and *action competence*, do not seem to be present in the paragraph, either explicitly or implicitly.

The conclusion for the moment is that five competences relating to the concept of ethical competence have been identified: reflective, normative, analytical, action and conceptual. These will be at the centre of the following analysis, which starts with a short commentary on the relevant knowledge requirements.

2.6 Knowledge Requirements

As the next step in this survey of the content regarding ethics in the RE syllabus, I will briefly mention the knowledge requirements "at the end of" year 6 and 9, respectively. In order to pass, a pupil has to reach the grade E; with a better performance, she could get grades between D and A, though only the requirements for C and A (as well as E) are presented in an explicit form. Teachers are expected to use the non-explicit grades D and B for achievements that are assessed as falling somewhere between the explicit ones.

The reason for giving such a brief presentation of the knowledge requirements relating to ethics is not that these requirements are not important. On the contrary, as I stated earlier in this chapter, I would say that the most serious obstacles to developing an ethics education where the core dimensions of ethics and morals are expressed, and where relevant conceptions of ethical competence are preserved and highlighted, are related to the formulation of, and the prescribed application of, formal requirements that seem to misrepresent – or even distort – the soul of what ethics is and ought to be. A consequence of this is that rigid apprehensions take over in the assessment procedure – at the same time as (as we have seen) several conceptions of ethical competence, that is to say that competence which ethics education is

expected to promote, are sanctioned in the aim and in the core content of the RE syllabus.

In what way do the knowledge requirements invite a rigid interpretation and an inflexible application? Let us see how the requirements are formulated! In the following quotations, the "quality words" that are used to distinguish between the grades E, C and A are presented in bold. At the end of year 6, the pupils have to fulfil these requirements with regard to what is being taught within ethics education in RE:

> Pupils can apply **simple/developed/well developed** reasoning about everyday moral issues, and what it might mean to do good. Pupils make reflections which **basically relate to the subject/carry the reasoning forward/carry the reasoning forward and deepen or broaden it** and use some ethical concepts in a **basically/relatively well/well** functional way. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 181f)

Corresponding requirements "at the end of year 9" are the following:

> Pupils can reason and argue about moral issues and values by applying **simple and to some extent/developed and relatively well/well developed and well** informed reasoning, and use ethical concepts and models in a **basically/relatively well/well** functional way. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 183f)

As can be seen, the discriminative criteria to use when assessing pupils' achievements do not seem to be very clear-cut. What is the difference between "developed" and "well-developed" reasoning about everyday moral issues? How is one to discriminate between uses of ethical concepts that is "relatively well" and "well" functional?

Now, this is an objection that could be directed towards any of the knowledge requirements in the 2011 national curriculum for compulsory school, since the "quality words" are used in a similar way for all subjects in the syllabus. This raises a problem that has to be taken seriously.

I will, however, as I have indicated above, concentrate on more specific obstacles that are related to the content in the knowledge requirements regarding ethics. More precisely, I will focus in the following upon three critical questions:

1. The knowledge requirements in question seem to include explicit or implicit references to three of the five competences identified in the syllabus in RE: reflective, analytical and conceptual competence. How come the other two, normative and action competence, are not included in the assessment context?
2. Given that the focus in this context is on competences which seem to be of a more or less intellectual and theoretical kind: What consequences will this have for the understanding of ethics, its fundamentals, its aims and its meaning, within ethics education in RE?
3. Given the situation described in the first two questions: Is it even possible to identify solid and trustworthy conditions for developing convincing assessment criteria for measuring achievements within school education in ethics?

2.7 Secular Ethics Education Within RE

Let us first of all, before going into discussions of the three critical questions, make two things clear. First, ethical issues are dealt with in many subjects in school, for example, history, geography and biology. The only subject that has a separately defined objective called "ethics" is, however, RE. This may be explained mainly in historical terms. In the 1960s, when non-confessional teaching was universally demanded, RE replaced the subject "Christianity" which had a more or less confessional aim and content. Since the responsibility for teaching religion in a non-biased and scientifically satisfying way fell on the shoulders of the teachers of the new subject, it was natural that ethics should be included in its syllabus. Religions and other outlooks on life all make room for ethical theory and moral praxis, and it therefore seemed both logical and rational for RE, which highlights various religious and existential traditions, to take responsibility for ethics education (Selander 2011; Algotsson 1975; Olivestam 2006; Osbeck and Skeie 2014).

Furthermore, in teacher education in RE, ethical theory and ethical didactics have been in focus, perhaps for historical reasons but also because this may have been taken to be a natural way of structuring ethics education.

There has been a critical discussion going on with reference to the structure described above, where ethics education is performed within religious instruction (Nucci 2003; Gates 1990; Tillson 2011). As RE, as will be described later on, is a non-confessional subject with no room for preaching or indoctrination, it might seem curious that a universally relevant area such as ethics should be handled under the heading "Religious Education". The current structure could give the misleading impression that ethics education in Sweden is confessional.

I do not want to make an argument concerning this structure here and now. I have elsewhere criticised it at a fundamental level (Franck 2014a), even though I believe that pragmatic reasons may be put forward in support of it, at least in the present educational situation. This criticism does not, however, have a bearing upon the analysis presented in this chapter.

There is also something else that has to be clarified from the start of the discussion about the three questions mentioned above. The Swedish curricula make it very clear that teaching in school should be non-confessional. In the context of the fundamental values that the school is said to "represent and impart" (Lgr11, 9), it is stated that "[t]eaching in the school should be non-denominational" (Lgr11, 9). This principle holds for teaching in all subjects, including RE. Of course, this does not mean that teachers in this subject are required not to talk about or discuss religious matters or religious convictions. On the contrary, they are expected to highlight issues that can be interpreted as being anchored in religion or relevant to religion (Franck 2016, 2014b). But the focus is supposed to be on the development of informed and non-biased knowledge, not on preaching or indoctrination.

Now this may seem to be non-problematic, in relation to secular teaching in RE, so why is it necessary to look at this issue? The reason is that even though we are speaking about secular teaching, the curricula seem to show some kind of inconsis-

tency when they state the demand for a non-confessional education – and in fact this possible inconsistency may be suspected to have some bearing upon how to interpret the ethical competences represented in the syllabus.

In the national curriculum for compulsory school, the following fundamental values are presented as being at the core of the school's work:

> The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 9)

As can be seen, the values are formulated in a universal way without any reference to specific traditions or ideologies. In the sentence that follows after this presentation, the school's task to represent and impart those values is, however, "in accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism".

This is a formulation that has caused a lot of debate in Sweden. Critics – some of them belonging to religious traditions (Piltz 1992) – have pointed out that it is not possible to identify something corresponding to "Christian ethics". Ethics may be justified and argued for on a variety of grounds, of which Christian tradition is one among many. The fundamental values mentioned in the syllabus are universal and so are the moral concepts listed with reference to Christian tradition and Western humanism. How come "a sense of justice" or "tolerance and responsibility" are tied to these religious and philosophical references? And what, in effect, characterises "Western humanism", distinguishing it from other traditions and approaches (Hedin 2014)?

Further, according to this argument, a risk with the approach in focus here seems to be that a separation between a *we* and a *they* is built into the syllabus and that the idea that the work carried out in schools has to be concentrated around a universal core that includes everyone, both pupils and teachers, and demands that all participants follow the same fundamental values, is threatened. If the implication is that there are values that are defined, or at least understood, with exclusive reference to a "Christian" and "Western humanistic" context, problems seem to arise when it comes to creating an educational environment that is both inclusive and tolerant (Lahdenperä 2010).

If ethics "borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism" is taken to serve as a guide for how schools are going to "represent and impart" the stated fundamental values, then it is hard to see how ethical competence could be understood in an impartial way. Of course this does not mean that each individual has to be a Christian or a "Western humanist", but on a general level, ethical competence in some way or another rests upon these two fundaments.

This is an argument which has to be taken seriously: if the reference to "Christian tradition and Western humanism" implies confessional conditions related to the aims of ethics education with regard to the development of ethical competence, defined in terms of the five competences identified in the analysis above, this would be not only a matter of inconsistency in the syllabus but also a real challenge to

inclusive and non-biased teaching about ethical issues. However, the reference does not have to be interpreted in this narrow way.

What the wording says in full is that "In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this [the school's duty to represent and impart the fundamental values listed] is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility". Nothing is said about "Christian ethics": the formulation may very well be interpreted in a broader way so as to be understood as "ethics explained in Christian terms". This could, perhaps, be said to be a confessional understanding that still expresses religious bias, but one has to remember that historically Sweden has in an official sense been Christian since King Olof Skötkonung was baptised in 1008, and most areas in society guiding the lives of the citizens have, for more than 1000 years, been ruled and characterised by the theology of Christianity and the interpretations this has sanctioned regarding norms and values. It does not seem to be unreasonable or even irrelevant that references to this hegemonic philosophy or conception of life would have a prominent role to play within ethics education in Sweden.

Furthermore, if education is to encourage respect for religious diversity, this pre-supposes an openness regarding communication of identities. This has, at least in the case of non-confessional teaching, little to do with preaching or indoctrination. Highlighting ethical issues with reference to how these have been interpreted through various periods in history, or how they are understood in the multifaceted Christian contexts in present times, does not involve any necessity to take a stand on specific questions. In accordance with the syllabus for RE, the purpose of the teaching is to analyse the variety of conceptions in ethical matters both between – and within – different religious and non-religious traditions. So, one may very well interpret the reference to Christian tradition in comparative cultural, rather than normative religious, terms. When pupils in Swedish schools are studying ethics, they will hopefully be familiar with moral approaches and moral standpoints connected to Christian tradition, which have ruled life in society as well as individuals' lives in the country over the centuries. A way of developing such a familiarity might be to look at significant ethical ideas expressed in literature, art, music, school and educational aims and methods, law, social service, health care and so on. None of these seems to imply a confessional or noninclusive teaching. On the contrary, the pupils may get the opportunity to see how ethics and ethical issues have been interpreted and applied within a Swedish historical context, not as model of how things generally should be but as a point of reference to develop well-grounded and well-informed analyses, built upon curiosity, engagement and respect.

I conclude that the criticism of references to Christian tradition, even though it introduces an important consideration, does not justify the removal of all references to Christian tradition from the Swedish syllabus for RE. However, it would also be a misinterpretation to maintain that a prerequisite for developing ethical competence is an adoption of or an engagement in Christian belief or Christian faith.

This does not mean that this is the end of the matter. The reference in question does not only mention Christian tradition but also Western humanism. In fact, the

fundamental values presented seem to be thought to constitute the essence of this humanism. If this essence is taken to distinguish "Western humanism" in an exclusive way, one has to object that this is simply not true. The values listed are, as was pointed out before, universal in that they may be formulated and interpreted within a huge range of traditions – philosophies, conceptions of life and ideologies. They are, in effect, very generally formulated, and there seems to be strong reason, historical as well as contemporary, for supposing that there are a wide range of interpretations and applications both between and within these traditions. The fundamental values cannot be exclusively tied to one or another of them (Hedin 2010; Lahdenperä 2010).

A problem of direct relevance to the question in focus in this chapter is, however, how to interpret these values with regard to the concept of ethical competence. What about the competences identified in the foregoing analysis? If the fundamental values given in the syllabus are thought to form the basis for the development of ethical competence, are they to be apprehended as more or less theoretical ideals, or are they rather to be seen as guidelines for a practical moral life? More precisely, is the ethics education within RE to be understood as being structured around theory building and knowledge development or as an arena where the fostering of moral values is required as a part of the work in schools (Franck 2014a)?

In the next section, I will state an argument against the prioritisation of ethically relevant competences in the knowledge requirements of the RE syllabus that were presented above, and then take a first step in developing this criticism with reference to some philosophical perspectives. In this discussion, I will continuously come back to the fundamental question: Is it theory or practice, thinking or action, which is at issue in the RE syllabus's conceptions of competences, which together possibly constitute *a* conception of ethical competence?

2.8 Relating the Five Competences to Each Other

In the foregoing analysis, five competences that are relevant to the concept of ethical competence were identified and labelled as "reflective", "conceptual", "normative", "analytical" and "action" competence, respectively. One question that has to be dealt with is how these competences may be thought to be related to each other. Is each one to be considered to represent a conception of ethical competence, or should they rather be interpreted as collectively contributing to a single conception of ethical competence? One could imagine several combinatory alternatives with two or more competences together making up a conception of ethical competence where specific characteristics or dimensions are in focus.

Let us first take a look at an example illustrating how the three competences expressed within the knowledge requirements could be thought to contribute to an understanding of the concept of ethical competence.

As may be remembered, the knowledge requirements at the end of year 6 state that:

Pupils can apply **simple/developed/well developed** reasoning about everyday moral issues, and what it might mean to do good. Pupils make reflections which **basically relate to the subject/carry the reasoning forward/carry the reasoning forward and deepen or broaden it** and use some ethical concepts in a **basically/relatively well/well** functional way. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 181f)

and at the end of year 9 that:

Pupils can reason and argue about moral issues and values by applying **simple and to some extent/developed and relatively well/well developed and well** informed reasoning, and use ethical concepts and models in a **basically/relatively well/well** functional way. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 183f)

I would like to start with an analysis focusing on what kinds of competences are at stake here. Which competences are the pupils required to master in order to apply reasoning about everyday moral issues, using ethical concepts and models in a functional way? It seems clear that conceptual competence is of specific relevance here. The competence to use what are called "ethical concepts" must be a requisite for fulfilling the demands prescribed in the knowledge requirements. What this means is, however, not explicitly indicated in the requirements. So let us see what can be said about this with reference to one of the concepts listed in the core content for year 4–6: the concept of equality.

In order to use this concept in a "basically/relatively well/well" functional way, it seems that one has to be able to understand the meaning of "equality" in the sense that this concept is used in language practices, which may be thought to be relevant to the ethical context that is implied in the syllabus. No concept is essentially and unequivocally "ethical". The question of what an "ethical concept" is is a matter of interpretation according to some more or less associative apprehensions of what a "language of ethics" is and how this language is to be used in interaction. If "equality" is to be defined as an ethical concept, as in the syllabus, then one dimension of a competent usage of it will be the recognising of it as an ethical concept, rather than as a concept referring to other areas of human language practice.

This is not the only dimension of a competent usage though. The demand in the knowledge requirements is that pupils are to use the concept "in a basically/relatively well/well functional way" – which means that some standards or some criteria are presupposed to guide the usage. Otherwise, there would be no way of discriminating with reference to the "quality words" that are supposed to be used to differentiate between the grades E, C and A. What kind of standards or criteria could these be? Well, no hints are given in the syllabus, which indicates that the concept is to be understood in some other way. So it seems that using the concept of equality in a competent way, in the present context, means using it in accordance with conventionally established language practices relevant to ethical contexts.

Would it be possible for a pupil to be conceptually creative, to use the concept in accordance with a new and previously unknown meaning? The answer is that the syllabus, even though it does not give any explicit hints, seems to be restrictive when it comes to such creativity. It has already placed the concept within an ethical context, and it seems that the boundaries around this context, even if they are not

rigid, are presupposed to be sufficiently clear-cut to constitute a basis for the demarcation of different qualities in pupils' usage of the concept of equality.

So the conclusion seems to be that conceptual competence with regard to the usage of "ethical concepts" such as "equality" means that a pupil is capable of using them in accordance with conventionally established practices with reference to ethical contexts. This seems, however, to be a rather vague characterisation of the competence in question. For if one asks in what way the teaching of ethics within RE, in accordance with the prescription of the syllabus, could "essentially" provide the pupils with opportunities to develop the ability to "reason and discuss moral issues and values based on ethical concepts and models", an ability which seems to be at stake here, then it is hard to believe that teaching of this kind is expected to develop only some kind of *linguistic competence*.

Looking, for example, at the items relating to ethics in the national tests, one can see that these have been formulated in a way that is thought to encourage the use of "ethical concepts", for example, "equality" (Skolverket 2013a), in the context of a task involving identifying various interpretations of the concepts and then, in some form or another, giving reasons for and against various applications of the concepts to concrete examples.

Furthermore, one has to consider the question of *how* "ethical concepts" are taught within ethics education in RE – or in any other subject. Would it be possible to teach the meaning of "equality" from exclusively linguistic premises? Why should the concepts in question be taught – "equality", "justice" and "tolerance" – are these "ethical concepts" prioritised on specifically linguistic grounds? Hardly! These concepts, which are to be found within the syllabus and in the national tests, are chosen because of their moral relevance – especially with regard to the fundamental values presented in the syllabus and quoted above. It is not easy to see how these concepts could be taught without any ethical bias – which means that the ethics education in schools aims for more than just a linguistic competence. The intention seems to be to help pupils to see the moral relevance of the meaning of these concepts – and the related challenges – and to give the pupils the opportunity to develop an ability to elaborate on this meaning, taking into account concrete situations that seem to be at stake when the syllabus is talking about "everyday moral issues".

So why, then, if the achievements indicated in the knowledge requirements seem to rest upon purely linguistic considerations, is the syllabus silent about relevant moral dimensions? It is difficult to present a reasonable answer, but maybe the intention is to strive for a clarity with regard to the assessment criteria, which might perhaps be thought to be threatened if the assessment based on the knowledge requirements were seen as including an evaluation of a morally relevant usage of the "ethical concepts" in question.

I think, however, that it is important to be straightforward concerning what the syllabus suggests should happen during the assessment process, and I will argue that it is a *conceptual* rather than a strictly *linguistic* competence which is meant to be assessed. This means that the pupils are required to develop a competence in doing something more than just applying words according to conventional meanings in

specific contexts.[4] To support this argument, I will elaborate on how the previously mentioned concept of equality (year 6) and the concept of forgiveness (year 9) were dealt with in a couple of test items and in the assessment instructions for the national tests of 2013, that is to say the only tests that are presently official.

2.9   Assessing Competences with Regard to Usage of the Concept of Equality (Year 6)[5]

In the first part of the national tests in RE for year 6 (2013), it was possible to identify a couple of items highlighting ethical issues. One of them, item 9, has a specific focus on the use of some "ethical concepts", namely, "empathy", "solidarity" and "equality". The pupils are instructed to read four sentences and then match one of the concepts to each of the sentences by checking boxes. Furthermore, they are asked to give short justifications for their choices.

The sentences are:

"Boys and girls should be treated alike", "If I see that someone feels left out, I will show that I would like to be a friend to that person", "Where I live, there is a gym. One team with boys and one team with girls have their training there. The teams get five hours each for training per week" and "In Sweden same-sex marriages are legal. That means that one has the right to marry someone of the same sex as oneself". (Skolverket 2013a, 18)[my translation][6]

It does not seem to be very easy to distinguish between the four sentences presented when looking for relevant concepts. "Equality", for example, could fit with at least two of them – and perhaps even with more. Looking at the assessment instructions, one can, consequently, find that rather generous criteria have been used in deciding that it is correct to match this concept to the first and the last sentences.

Which competences are pupils to master when working with this item? The pupils – who, it should be noted, are 12 or 13 years old – are instructed to match the various concepts to the sentences presented. These sentences do not, either explicitly or implicitly, express a strictly linguistically identifiable meaning. The alternatives "Boys and girls should be treated alike" and "In Sweden same-sex marriages are legal. That means that one has the right to marry someone of the same sex as oneself" cannot be characterised as being limited to presenting a linguistic defini-

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[4] This is not meant to minimise the obstacles pupils, particularly those with Swedish as secondary language, may experience when doing the tests. A certain amount of linguistic competence is certainly required in order to understand and to answer the items, a requirement which may have consequences for the development of the other competences mentioned (see Osbeck et al. 2015).

[5] The discussion in the following two paragraphs is based on a critical rereading of the tests given in 2013, tests constructed within a process in which I was involved.

[6] Note that all translations in this section and the next, both of the national tests and the assessment instructions, are my own.

tion or explanation of the concept of equality. It would be possible to argue, for example, that boys and girls should be treated differently in certain respects, depending upon physical, psychological, biological, cultural or moral conditions, at the same time treating both of them with the same degree of profound respect and attachment. I do not say that this would be a morally preferable way to go but only that someone without contradiction *could* object to the idea that it is correct to match the concept of equality to the first sentence. And this "someone" could also question or deny that "the right to marry someone of the same sex as oneself" should be interpreted primarily as a matter of equality. An ethically conservative person could, for example, make a case that "equality" does not mean that everyone has the right to do what she or he wants but rather that people should be given the same, or similar, opportunities, as long as this happens within the boundaries of recommendable moral principles.

Now there certainly are boundaries beyond which the meaning of a concept or of a sentence starts to show cracks – or even ceases to exist. Even though language and verbal communication in lots of respects can be characterised as "porous", that does not mean that words, concepts and sentences may be used in any way. If communication is to be possible, some common core or structure expressing what may be called the "meaning" of, say, a concept has to be accepted by the partaking subjects (Putnam 1982). As Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his later work, pointed out, there is no private language (Wittgenstein 1979). Language is, according to Wittgenstein, an ongoing process, following and challenging the rules of a variety of language-games, relating the participants to each other through the playing, the partaking and the activities in the games. Of course, the concept of meaning may be applied in a huge range of ways in accordance with the rules in different language-games. It may also be applied to one and the same concept in different ways, if these alternatives could be sanctioned with reference to the rules in question.

The relevance to the analysis of the use of the concept of equality is this. If pupils are going to understand the sentences in the presented item in the national test for year 6, and if they are going to be clear about what their task is to be in relation to this item, there must be some common semantic core that links the test constructors to the pupils via the concept "equality". This linguistic core does not, however, constitute the only clue that could assist the pupils in their struggle to handle the instructions for this item. Another one is the contextually situated interpretation that is built into the formulation of the item by the constructors. The constructors apparently do not want answers revealing some lexical knowledge about the concept of equality, and neither do they seem to want a reformulation of the common semantic core, the existence of which is a prerequisite for pupils' communicative understanding of the instructions given. They are asking for something more, something which indicates that the item constitutes an ethical arena, or rather, is a part of such an arena, where the use of the concept of "equality" involves dressing in interpretive "clothes", which have to be identified and put on if one is going to play successfully with regard to the rules of the arena, the language-game, in question.

The constructors' commentaries on the items, which are to be found in the assessment instructions, give strong support for this picture of what is going on. As

authentic examples of answers that satisfy the criteria for the grade E, the following are quoted [my translations throughout]:

Equality: Equality means that something is alike or equal. (Skolverket 2013a, 18)

(referring to the first of the sentences mentioned above) and:

Equality: It is equality because it is equal if boys and girls marry or if two girls or two boys marry. (Skolverket 2013a, 18)

The constructors comment on these two answers, saying that they are acceptable, even though they (according to the demands of the knowledge requirements) are "simple" and that they indicate that the pupil shows a "certain understanding of the content of the concept".

As an example, referring to the first sentence in the item, of what kind of answer would receive the higher grade C, the following is mentioned:

Equality: I chose equality because girls and boys should be treated alike. And equality means that everyone should be treated in the same way, that is to say one should treat everyone alike and show respect, regard to everyone. (Skolverket 2013a, 19)

Finally, let us turn to grade A and see which examples of answers that are presented! One example referring to the first sentence in the item is this:

Equality: I chose equality because that word says that it should be equal and fair for everyone. Unfortunately it is not always so. (Skolverket 2013a, 19)

Another example, referring to the last sentence in the item, is this:

Equality: It is equal because then everyone is treated alike. One should be able to like the one one wants to like. (Skolverket 2013a, 19)

In their comments the constructors say that the pupil, in her or his explanation, "uses the ethical concepts in a developed way", showing a good sense of understanding them by giving relevant examples and reasons in several steps (Skolverket 2013a, 19).

These commentaries are formulated within a context, a language-game, where certain interpretive prerequisites are dominant. Nowhere is this context made explicit. It rests upon implicit keystones, which, so to speak, are the objects of silent agreement. The test items are constructed within a context where certain apprehensions of ethics and ethics education are presupposed, and the pupils, responding to these items, know – even though they may have other opinions about how to interpret the concepts in question – that they have to keep to the interpretive norm with regard to which the items in the test are constructed. By asking the pupils to combine "ethical concepts" with the given sentences, suggesting that some more or less unproblematic correspondence exists between each concept and the sentence to which it is supposed to refer, the item discourages objections and critical reflections. The only thing pupils are instructed to do is to explain why she or he has chosen to prioritise a certain correspondence relation – but without being given the opportunity to question whether this relation really exists in the way that is presupposed in the item. The pupil is caught within a certain language-game, a game where specific

interpretations of concepts, used within what are defined as "ethical" or "ethically relevant" contexts, have to be accepted, if not for any other reason that this is the only way of passing the test with a satisfying, or successful, result.

2.10   Assessing Competences with Regard to Usage of the Concept of Forgiveness (Year 9)

Perhaps the argument becomes even more forceful when looking briefly at the structure and content of another item, this time from the 2013 test for year 9. In item 12, the following task is presented:

> The word "forgiveness" is an important ethical concept. Perhaps you yourself have forgiven someone or have had the experience of being forgiven. Reason about why forgiveness may be important **both** for the one **asking for forgiveness** and for the one who **forgives**? (Skolverket 2013b, 8)

As in the earlier example from the national tests for year 6, these instructions immediately present the concept in question, "forgiveness", as being "ethical" – and furthermore as an "important" ethical concept. This axiom is the foundation for the construction of the item, where the inevitability of the double characterisation ("ethical" and "important") is turned into a personal request for the pupil to handle: How come forgiveness "may be important for the one asking for forgiveness and for the one who forgives"?

Which options for conceptual and ethical creativity could be thought to be open a pupil who is hesitating about, or directly hostile to, the supposed ineluctable characterisation of the concept of forgiveness? The assessment instructions give the following criteria for answers for grade E. The pupil must present:

> **simple** reasoning about the concept of forgiveness with regard to **at least one** of the two aspects mentioned in the question: the active, "to forgive", or the passive, "to be forgiven", for example by clarifying the content of this aspect. (Skolverket 2013c, 12)

The criteria for grades C and A have the same structure but point out that "developed" reasoning and "well-developed" reasoning, respectively, justify awarding these grades. An authentic example of an answer meriting a C is said to be this:

> Why could it be hard to forgive? It can be hard to forgive because one is still sad or angry with the person whom one has to forgive. It can be tough to forgive because one perhaps wants to be sad or angry and, one maybe does not want to leave it all and move on. (Skolverket 2013c, 13)

More interesting is, perhaps, the authentic answer given for grade A, which goes like this:

> If one knows that one has done something wrong, one often has feelings about it and has a bad conscious and it is hard to stop thinking about it, one often goes around, thinking about what one could had done differently. Therefore it seems very important to be able to ask for forgiveness. I usually think that it is better to say how things really are and say "forgive me", than having to bear the burden of guilt. It is also very important to forgive, often

directly after something has happened so that it may feel tough to forgive because one is still sad that the person did what he did. But one can give it some time and think it over. Everyone may make mistakes sometimes, and it can happen that later on one will regret if one is not able to forgive. Maybe one notices how bad the other one feels for what has been done, most often one feels empathy for that person because one has, most often, had some kind of relation to that person before, and even though the person does not reveal that much about how sad he is, that does not mean that he does not regret, perhaps he just does not have the courage to reveal his feelings. (Skolverket 2013c, 13)

I have quoted this answer in extenso, partly because it is, to my mind, a very clear illustration of what may be thought to be going on in the minds of struggling pupils when they, in the communicative process involved in taking the national tests, are trying to handle the task of following instructions, where specific and supposedly non-debatable presuppositions guide what the pupils should do if they are going to pass or do well in the test. The quoted answer shows very well how one pupil, taking the instructions (and the axiom upon which they are based) very seriously, tries to learn how to follow a route with no, or at least very few, turnings. Forgiveness is an ethical concept. Understood! Forgiveness is an important ethical concept. Understood! Forgiveness may be important for both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. Understood! Reason about this. Alright!

The other motive for quoting the answer above at length is that its inclusion as an example of an answer meriting an A grade reveals how the ethical prerequisites of the assessment process play a role when the criteria are applied to specific responses, as part of the language-game within which the tests are taking place.

As a commentary to the quoted answer, the constructors say the following:

The pupil addresses both aspects of the concept of forgiveness in a developed way and starts by reasoning about the importance of being forgiven. The pupil uses words or formulations such as bad conscience, feelings of guilt, doing otherwise, talk about it, and so on. Then the pupil continues by highlighting the other aspect: being able to forgive. The pupil problematises and brings in an aspect of time regarding the difficulty in forgiving directly after something has happened, but that, in time, one will come to the conclusion that everyone makes mistakes. The pupil problematises further and considers that how someone feels is not wholly visible, which is a complication in the process of reconciliation. The pupil writes that the consequences of not being able to forgive may be that one will regret it at some stage. Independently of which aspect is used, forgive, or be forgiven, the pupil presents a well-developed reasoning and an insight regarding what it takes to move on. (Skolverket 2013c, 14)

Here it seems obvious that the assessment criteria, when operationalised, are applied with reference to more than strictly linguistic considerations. Rather it seems that this commentary involves some kind of moral – and existential – reflections, which are taken to explain why the quoted answer is to be seen as deserving of the highest grade. The pupil is said to highlight important aspects of the relation between forgiving and forgiven subjects, as well as reflecting upon how each of these subjects may think and feel about what has happened. Furthermore, the pupil is assumed to have an insight regarding what it takes to proceed. All these qualities are indeed ascertained to be parts of, or rather to constitute, well-developed reasoning, which seems to correspond to the demands for grade A in the knowledge

requirements. Still, there are, to my mind, reasons for doubting that this is the only grounds for awarding the answer an A grade.

2.11   The Challenge Regarding Ethics and Assessment

What I have tried to do in the foregoing paragraphs is to put forward a convincing argument in support of the hypothesis that the knowledge requirements in the RE syllabus, in spite of their formal character, in practice involve more than the application of strictly linguistic, reflective, conceptual and analytical competences. To satisfy the demands expressed in the requirements, pupils have to show that they have the competence to understand the linguistic meaning of the concepts involved, they have to show that they are able to elaborate on and use the concepts in relation to a variety of relevant situations, they have to show an ability to formulate and evaluate arguments supporting various standpoints on ethical issues, and they have to show a capacity for analysing concepts and arguments, where these are seen as multifaceted and not easily generalisable. My point is that pupils are also required to show another competence, namely, one that presupposes a familiarity with the ethical axioms that guide communication within the ethics educational language-game, within which, for example, the national tests in RE are constructed and used. I will characterise this competence as an action competence – a competence that was identified in the earlier analysis of the syllabus in RE, including the aim of the subject as it is presented there.

Before turning to an elaboration of the meaning of this competence, I will, to make things clear, just say a few words about what the argument mentioned above does *not* involve. First, it does not include a denial of what may seem to be a fact, namely, that the five previously mentioned competences play, and should play, a role, within ethics and within ethics education. Ethical issues are complicated, and if they are going to be treated reliably and responsibly, they have to be the objects of careful analyses where all five competences will contribute and co-operate in the ongoing interpretive processes.

Second, the argument does not involve a complete denial of the fact that assessment procedures carried out in accordance with the knowledge requirements could pave the way for important contributions regarding the evaluation of pupils' achievements within ethics education. If what is thought to be at stake in such an evaluation is the identification and the assessment of information about whether and how pupils reflect upon, use, interpret and analyse "ethical concepts" and related arguments, then perhaps the criteria expressed in the knowledge requirements will fulfil a relevant aim.

It may seem to be reasonable to maintain that within ethics education, it is important for teachers to have access to evaluative tools in order to be able to assess to what extent pupils are developing their competences. However, a narrow-minded focus on these tools, as though they were the only ones suitable for evaluation, leads to an exclusivist fundamentalism that runs the risk of distancing what is assessed in

ethics from the core of what ethics is frequently understood to be about. The meaning of "doing ethics" is not the training of intellectual capacities, measured according to general criteria that correspond to rules established by bureaucrats or politicians. The meaning relates to the development of abilities that, by contributing to pupils' ethical competence, may give them the chance to make a difference in a life that is lived together with other people. This is the soul of ethics, the existential keystone upon which its meaning and its significance are built.

As was seen in the presentation at the beginning of this chapter, this seems to be an intention expressed in the aim, but also in the core content and in the knowledge requirements, of the RE syllabus. Virtue ethics is prioritised in the sense that it is mentioned in many places in the syllabus and explicitly emphasised as a resource for a teaching which does not first and foremost focus on questions about right and wrong but raises more fundamental issues about "what a good life may be" and what characterises someone "being good".

If the criteria of the knowledge requirements are viewed as being focussed on factual knowledge, the position could be likened to a parallel one sometimes discussed with reference to teaching in religion. Some years ago, Stephen Prothero, a professor at Boston University, suggested that ignorance in religious matters, identifiable among the American population according to Prothero, necessitates the development of religious literacy by promoting knowledge about a certain number of religious concepts (Prothero 2008). In criticism of Prothero, perhaps on rather unfair grounds (von Brömssen 2013), it has been objected that "religious literacy" seems to involve something more than conceptual competence, placing too much emphasis on factual knowledge (Gallagher 2009).

I have in another context formulated a similar criticism regarding when "ethical literacy" is interpreted in an exclusively conceptual way, resting upon factual knowledge about which moral principles exist in a given society and how they are interpreted (Franck 2013). I would say that the same holds when it comes to an exclusive fixation on the formal assessment criteria expressed in the knowledge requirements in the RE syllabus. Such an exclusivism limits what is to be counted as "competence" and "knowledge" within ethics education, and this will be something going on at a distance from the core, the heart, of what ethics is and of what education about ethics should be.

Third, as the preceding argument shows, it seems that the knowledge requirements, while running the risk of being used in some kind of impersonal assessment procedure, at the same time, create space for including more competence dimensions than the ones specifically identified with reference to the knowledge requirements (linguistic, reflective, conceptual and analytical). The argument does not rest upon, or lead to, a claim that such further dimensions *must* be thought to play a role within the assessment procedure. What the argument shows, however, is that it is at least *probable* that this will be the case. The aim in choosing examples from the national tests to support the hypothesis was to point out that since it is well known that teachers study the tests in order to identify both what should be taught and according to which parameters pupils' achievements should be assessed (Lundahl

2009), the principles sanctioned in the tests will probably be reproduced within Swedish ethics education.

According to the interpretation put forward in this chapter, these principles are not wholly transparent and unequivocal. The body that is responsible for the national tests is the Swedish Agency for Education, that is to say the same authority that is responsible for the curricula for compulsory school and upper secondary school. There are good reasons to expect that the principles sanctioned in the assessment instructions, from the Agency's point of view, correspond to the knowledge requirements in the RE syllabus. If the argument presented is correct, then there are reasons for hesitating about whether one of the fundamental aims of the school reforms, the clarification of what achievements pupils are required to obtain, has been fulfilled with regard to the RE syllabus, especially with reference to the knowledge requirements. If the four competences explicitly reflected in the knowledge requirements are not the only ones playing a role in the assessment procedure, as this is presented in the assessment instructions, then something highly important seems to be missing in the information given to the teachers who are asked to follow the principles prescribed in these instructions.

2.12   Action Competence

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of teaching in ethics, as this is described in the RE syllabus, is to:

> encourage pupils to reflect over various issues concerning life, their identity and their ethical attitudes. In this way, teaching should create the conditions for pupils to develop a personal attitude to life and an understanding of how they and others are thinking and living. Teaching should help pupils to develop their knowledge of how different religions and other outlooks on life view questions concerning gender, gender equality, sexuality and relationships. Pupils should, in addition, be equipped to analyse and determine their standpoint in ethical and moral questions. Teaching should also contribute to pupils developing an understanding of how people's values are linked to religions and other outlooks on life. It should also contribute to pupils developing their capacity to act responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings. (*Curriculum* Lgr11, 176)

This aim, which was quoted earlier in this chapter, includes sections which allude to all five competences mentioned above, and it ends with a sixth one: teaching should make contributions to pupils' development of their "capacity to act responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings". As was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the section presenting the aim of teaching ethics in RE allows for a wide and nuanced interpretation of which abilities that could be of relevance and importance for the development of ethical competence. Looking at the knowledge requirements, however, one can, as was stated, see that these, on the surface, make reference to four competences identified in the analysis, competences that are formulated in a language that seems to make room for exclusively formal

assessment procedures in accordance with the criteria prescribed: linguistic, reflective, conceptual and analytical.

The discussion of the examples from the national tests showed, however, that these procedures involve more dimensions than the ones represented by these four competences. The language-game within which the formal criteria are applied presupposes and makes use of ethical axioms that are neither made explicit nor defended. In the example from the tests for year 6, specific interpretations (with moral implications) of concepts that are described as "ethical" are sanctioned. In the example from the tests for year 9, the concept of forgiveness is described according to an apprehension that is tacitly assumed to be preferable and reasonable.

Both these examples bring the relevance of action competence to the fore. It is important to be clear about how this happens. Action competence involves various dimensions of action in relation to personal motivation strengthened through a willingness to make things happen with regard to others as well as to oneself (Kaplan 2000). An interesting definition of action competence – and one that has been discussed in many contexts is the following, presented in Schnack (1994):

> Capability – based on critical thinking and incomplete knowledge – to involve yourself as a person with other persons in responsible actions and counter-actions for a more humane world. (Schnack 1994, p. 190)

This definition has been used within areas where education for sustainable development (ESD) are in focus, but, as Ellen Almers has pointed out, there are dimensions of this definition that are more or less relevant in a general sense. What Schnack, in effect, says is that competence for action involves critical thinking, an awareness that knowledge is important even though no one ever will acquire all that knowledge that would be of relevance and interest and a social engagement aiming to contribute to a better world for all. Almers remarks that this is to say that action competence involves the three classical dimensions of knowledge, discussed and analysed since antiquity: episteme, techne and phronesis (Almers 2009).

The hypothesis of this chapter is that action competence plays a role in the assessment procedures in RE when knowledge requirements highlighting ethics are applied. It is not that teachers are expected to evaluate actions carried out in practice by pupils (cf. Davison et al. 2016). Rather they are supposed to use the formal criteria expressed in the knowledge requirements within an ethics educational language-game, where the relevant concepts are supposed to include more or less specific ethical contents, and are apprehended as "action-guiding" (Kotzee 2011) in the sense that it is suggested that certain actions are to be interpreted as reasonable consequences of the contents in question.

This hypothesis seems to be consistent with what is said in the aim of the RE syllabus, but it is still unclear in what way action competence may be thought to work together with the other five competences when pupils take part in ethics education and when teachers assess their achievements in accordance with the knowledge requirements. Most of all it still seems to be an open question how theory and practice interact within ethics education. It seems that teachers, when using the formal criteria in the knowledge requirements, may identify pupils' linguistic,

reflective, conceptual and analytical competences – in some way or another. It is primarily a question of the approach to *episteme* and *techne*, as they are embedded in the ethical issues highlighted within the teaching. But since the aim of the RE syllabus also includes prescriptive statements about *phronesis*, which seem to play a prominent role within the assessment procedures anchored in the knowledge requirements, the whole project concerning the assessment of achievements in ethics education is afflicted by vagueness. Why are the pupils studying ethics? Is it, according to the knowledge requirements, because it is thought to be important that children and young people in Swedish schools develop competence in linguistic literacy, reflection, interpretation of "ethical concepts", reasoning about relevant arguments and ethical analysis? Or is it, turning to the aim of the subject of RE, because pupils are to develop competence in acting "responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings" (Lgr11, 176)? In the latter case, it will be of great importance to keep the fundamental values presented in the syllabus in mind, in order to decide what kind of actions are preferable. And here it seems that a comprehensive and trustworthy analysis cannot be carried out unless another competence neglected in the national test context, *normative* competence, the competence for developing personal attitudes and personal standpoints with regard to ethical issues, is taken into consideration. For the pupils to act "with responsibility in relation to themselves and their surroundings" seems to be a competence that cannot be wholly understood and interpreted without reference to an analysis of how personal attitudes and personal standpoints play a role in the pattern of actions.

This situation is highly unsatisfying, because teachers of ethics education are working with criteria for assessment that are unclear and the possible object of a variety of interpretations. It may be that the RE syllabus makes room for a variety of conceptions of ethical competence, but in that case, things have to be clarified as far as possible. In fact, here is the key point where the view of the problems has to be widened, in order to look for support, and hopefully minimise the most acute obstacles. Assessment theory is not an exact science, and assessment practice is certainly not one. But that does not mean that it would be in vain to aim for more transparency and more clarity. Most importantly, when assessing pupils' achievements within ethics education, several challenges, as we have seen, arise regarding the fundamentals of such an education: its motives, its aim and its expected outcomes.

I believe that one constructive way to proceed, in order to be able to put forward a plausible interpretation of the situation outlined, is to make use of some concepts within a well-known philosophical approach: "the capability approach" developed by Martha Nussbaum, partly in communication with Amartya Sen. I will do this with regard to the three questions put forward earlier in this chapter:

1. The knowledge requirements in question seem to include explicit or implicit references to four of the six competences identified in the syllabus in RE: linguistic, reflective, conceptual and analytical competence. How come the other two, normative and action competence, are not included in the assessment context?

2. Given that the focus in this context is on competences that seem to be of a more or less intellectual and theoretical kind: What will the consequences be regarding the picture of ethics, its foundations, its aims and its meaning, within ethics education in RE?
3. In light of the considerations highlighted in the first two questions: Is it even possible to identify solid and trustworthy conditions for developing convincing assessment criteria for measuring achievements within school education in ethics?

2.13   Capability and Phronesis

According to Nussbaum and Sen, a focus for ethical and political reflection has to be the striving for a society where people live a good life, where they have the opportunity for self-realisation together with others – that is to say where it is possible for them to reach the inner human goal and experience *eudaimonia*, a happiness which is durable and not just transient. One of their book titles is *The Quality of Life*, and there and in other texts, they emphasise the importance of each person having opportunities to develop certain fundamental capabilities, which together lay the ground for a good life, for the individual together with fellow humans (Nussbaum and Sen 1993). Especially on Nussbaum's part, this "good life" is interpreted in terms of phronesis (Nussbaum 1990, 2003, 2011).

Looking especially to her elaboration of these ideas, what is at stake here is that the approach in question maintains that ethics is and should be about identifying the boundaries that hinder people from developing capabilities that could help them to live a good life. In addition, such an ethical approach should have a focus on how to help people to engage in such a development with the aim of existential and moral self-realisation. Nussbaum has presented ten well-known capabilities that, according to her, are to be seen as fundamentals for living a good life – and it is, in this context, worth quoting them:

1. *Life*
2. *Bodily health*
3. *Bodily integrity*
4. *Senses, imagination and thought*
5. *Emotions*
6. *Practical reason*
7. *Affiliation*
8. *Other species*
9. *Play*
10. *Control over one's environment* (Nussbaum 2011)

I will not mention Nussbaum's explanations of each one of these, but it is worth emphasising that all of them are in one way or another highlighted with regard to how boundaries that stop people from developing themselves could be challenged and eliminated.

Why is this approach interesting with regard to the first question presented above: How come normative and action competence are not included in the assessment context established with reference to the knowledge requirements? The reason lies in the neo-Aristotelian fundament upon which Nussbaum builds her version of the capability approach. She argues that this approach certainly has a subjectivistic dimension in that the capabilities presented are internally established: there is no "objective" proof to confirm their tenability or reasonableness. On the other hand, she maintains that there is a general agreement regarding their value and importance. Consequently one may say that they are *relative* to people's apprehensions and interpretations, but that does not mean that ethical anarchy is going to take over (Nussbaum 2011).

Furthermore, these capabilities have to be studied and described in the light of the concept of *action*. The ethical aim is that human beings will be given opportunities to develop a good life by transforming their capabilities into *doing* those kinds of things that will pave the way for achieving this aim. In one sense it is correct to describe such "doing" in terms of "rational strategies" for taking the responsibility for one's life seriously, trying to reconcile one's own subjective aims in the development of more or less universally accepted capabilities with the aims of fellow humans. In another sense this ethical strategy cannot be captured in terms of "reason" alone. For Nussbaum, emotions constitute indispensable ways for finding out what human life is about, what human societies are and should be about and what the world is and ought to be about. The "analytical technique" (Zivkovic 1995) presented by Nussbaum is a method for identifying and analysing the complexity of human beings' lives and relationships. It is a narrative technique according to which reading and reflecting upon literature will help someone to get a picture of how complicated life is and how personal choices in moral and existential matters are affected by not only reason but also emotions. This technique widens the possibilities for a rich and trustworthy understanding of inevitable and changeable conditions for developing good "qualities of life". In *Love's Knowledge* Nussbaum states that:

> certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist. (Nussbaum 1990, 5)

Form and content, in literature, are intertwined in a specific way, making room for ethical reflection and moral insight. But such reflection and such insight are not to be analytically distanced from the realities of a personal human life.

In *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Nussbaum analyses a variety of conceptions of how human emotions are related to human reason, starting by criticising the Stoic apprehension according to which the human subject, striving for existential tranquillity*, ataraxia*, should try to get rid of emotion in order to be free and not dependent on things lying outside the range of self-control. Nussbaum argues that such a "rational" strategy will lead to an absence of such fundamental conditions for a good life as love and compassion. This strategy does not, according to Nussbaum, lead to "a good life": values that are indispensable for the development of a good life for oneself and others, where the capabilities identified above

are in focus, have been placed outside the rational map which is thought to be read and interpreted by impersonal and strictly analytical eyes. Emotions, according to Nussbaum, are the companions to reason – in ethical reflection and in moral action (Nussbaum 2003). The capability approach is not just a theoretical framework for carrying out ethical analyses but constitutes a theoretical-practical fundament with reference to which phronetic strategies for the development of a good life, for each individual together with others, are put forward. Action competence, to use the label discussed above, requires that the other competences mentioned – linguistic, reflective, conceptual, normative and analytical – co-operate on a theoretical as well as on a practical level.

What may be learned from Nussbaum's approach is that reason and emotions are intertwined in human existential and moral life and that the aim for ethical reflection and argumentation is to be related more or less directly to action – and action competence. Ethics is not a strictly theoretical discipline applicable exclusively in terms of analytical and rational reasoning. A sense of love and compassion for fellow human beings constitutes the fundament for ethical reasoning and moral practice that will lead to the development of capabilities for making room for a good life for oneself as well as for other people. This is to practise *phronesis*.

I do not think that Nussbaum would have approved of the conventionalised and short examples that are used in some of the items falling under the heading "Ethics" in the national tests. They do not invite pupils to identify and reflect upon the very complex nature of moral dilemmas and moral choices. Neither do they, at least not in a detailed way, mirror the obstacles that may be noticed and felt by the moral subject in her relation to challenging situations where her interests and wishes and other people's interests and wishes may be confronted. How, then, would it be possible for the pupils to give answers that reflect this complex and complicated moral life?

As we saw in the earlier analyses of the assessments of some pupils' answers in tests from 2013, it seems, however, that the ethics education language-game in question involves rules that implicitly presuppose specific apprehensions of when a certain ethical approach or a specific action is to be prioritised. The problem with this is not that ethics education, as it is manifested in the national tests, is not objective in a traditional sense: as Nussbaum argues, the classical split between "objectivity" and "subjectivity" has to be challenged. The problem is that neither the test items nor the assessment instructions make the presuppositions in question explicit – with the consequence that the whole assessment process regarding items about ethics within the national tests is presented as a rational, more or less impersonal and intellectual activity, which sanctions linguistic, conceptual, reflective and analytical competence. Action competence and consequently normative competence seem to be left out of the picture, even though they contribute in fundamental ways to building up the ethics education language-game.

Perhaps this invisibility is due to an intention to avoid suggesting that the pupils should engage in "practical reasoning", which it could be hard to make the object of formal assessment with reference to the knowledge requirements. What Nussbaum shows, however, is, first, that ethics and ethics education is, and has to be, about

more than striving to develop theoretical and intellectual competences. Action competence is central for the promotion of an ethical approach that, on an individual as well as on a social level, aims for people to live a good life by developing fundamental and universal capabilities – which presupposes the co-operation of reason and emotions.

Secondly, this leads also to an indication of an answer to the second question above: Given that the focus in the ethics education language-game is concentrated around competences which seem to be of a more or less intellectual and theoretical kind, what will the consequences be with regard to the picture of ethics, its fundamentals, its aims and its meaning, within the ethics education in RE? The answer is that the critics mentioned at the beginning of this chapter may be said to be right. They opposed the rational and impersonal education that they believe will follow if the core content and the knowledge requirements in the syllabus are strictly applied (Selander 2011; Björlin 2011).

Nussbaum's approach shows that it is fundamental to avoid implying such a message about what ethics and ethics education is all about. Ethics has to be understood in terms of reason and emotions, opening up for the development of capabilities – which may demand competences of various kinds: linguistic, conceptual, reflective, analytical, normative and action oriented. The question is whether and how it is possible to apply this approach in order to revise the parts of the national tests in RE that highlight ethics. That is, in effect, the core of the third question presented above.

2.14   How to Find Ways to Proceed

The conclusion from the foregoing discussion is certainly not that the capability approach is thought to be *the* way forward in order to constructively handle the challenges identified in relation to the Swedish RE syllabus and the corresponding national tests. This is an approach developed with a general philosophical-political aim that reaches far beyond the limited – though important – arena, where school, teaching and ethics constitute language-games within which pupils and teachers engage according to specific rules, norms, codes and so on. Furthermore, the capability approach has been criticised in various relevant ways: interesting arguments have, for example, questioned the fact that Nussbaum fails to distinguish between capabilities which are universally accepted and capabilities which *ought to be* protected and that the "normative criterion" of being *truly human* is not explained in a way that allows for making judgments about which capabilities are to be labelled "fundamental" ones (Claassen and Düwell 2013).

What is interesting for the present purpose is, however, that the capability approach, as this is described by Nussbaum, includes elements which could help to open up for a deepened understanding of how the concept of ethical competence can, and perhaps ought to, be understood with reference to the RE syllabus and the national tests. If this looks like an over-instrumentalistic way of interpreting Nussbaum, it is worth noting that there are more reasons at issue here than just find-

ing a more or less developed strategy to *use* in order to come to grips with things that are rather unsatisfying. I believe that Nussbaum's arguments in favour of a phronetic approach when highlighting the fundamentals of ethics are both relevant to and valuable for anyone working in school, trying to find a way of *teaching ethics*, while at the same time satisfying the demand to *do ethics*, in lively, creative and sensitive ways.

The approach presented by Nussbaum in books and articles during the last decades is rich and comprehensive, and it is not possible to carry out a comprehensive analysis in this context. The aim of this chapter is much more humble: to point out some threads that may be valuable when trying to develop a strategy for handling the fundamental issue of assessment in ethics education. Looking to research made in relation to the heading "Ethics and Assessment", the focus in the material that has been published seems to be questions regarding teachers' responsibility and requirements in relation to the task of assessment and teaching in general (Grant and Matemba 2013; Wyatt-Smith and Klenowski 2013; Radnor et al. 1995; Brooks and Fancourt 2012). This is, naturally, a fundamental issue from many points of view, but it is not the issue in question right now. What we have been discussing is the concept of ethical competence according to the wording of the Swedish RE syllabuses and in the national tests in RE. We have focused on six identifiable competences that have been taken to be involved in the concept in question as this is presented in the syllabus for compulsory school. It has been argued that two of them – normative competence and action competence – are not explicitly mentioned in the national tests or the corresponding assessment instructions but that they still play a role in the development of the assessment criteria used, especially when commenting upon examples where pupils' answers are evaluated in relation to the grades A–E.

The analysis that has been carried out has led to the conclusion that the national tests are constructed and used within an ethics education language-game, where explicit as well as implicit norms and criteria form the conceptions of ethics and ethical competence. Since what seems to be a divergence between explicit and implicit criteria for ethical competence has been identified, it has been argued that a fundamental challenge has to be met: if assessment in ethics education is to be performed in a reasonable way, taking into account all relevant abilities and skills that together make up the content of the concept of ethical competence, in what ways and how does it have to be revised and developed? Nussbaum makes three contributions to the development of a relevant strategy:

1. Ethics is not, and ought not to be, an exclusively analytical or impersonal issue: It always involves the pursuit of normative and widely agreed-upon capabilities for the development of good lives, in a phronetic sense.
2. The prioritisation of values relating to selected capabilities demands an intimate co-operation between reasons and emotions.
3. There are "analytical techniques" such as reading literature, which may help us all to confront complex existential and moral challenges in life, taking

on both one's own and others' need for *eudaimonia*, existential and moral self-realisation.

2.15   Reconsideration in the Light of the Concept of Values Education

Could these contributions lay a foundation for a revision of the assessment policy applied in the national tests? This is a question that has to be handled with regard to the general design of ethics education in Sweden, which may be characterised as *values education* (Colnerud and Thornberg 2003; Johansson and Thornberg 2014), which has been given the following definition:

> *the aspect of the pedagogical practice which results in moral and political values, such as norms, dispositions and competence which are built upon those values, being communicated to or developed by children and young people.* (Johansson and Thornberg 2014, 10) [my translation]

The authors in question refer to *values education* as a wide concept including several threads and dimensions: character education, moral education, democratic education and citizenship education (Johansson and Thornberg 2014, 10). They are arguing that the approaches and methods used in values education will vary in different societal contexts, due to relevant political and ideological processes (Johansson and Thornberg 2014; cf. Taylor 1994). There is no persistent content in values education, and there is not just one ethical theory that is sanctioned throughout the field. Therefore, values education, as well as research about values education, will always be in progress.

The conclusions that have been drawn in the discussion in this chapter are not overthrown by such a characterisation of Swedish ethics education. On the contrary, an analysis carried out in order to come to terms with the third question presented in particular – is it possible to identify solid and trustworthy conditions for developing convincing assessment criteria for measuring achievements within school education in ethics? – does not necessarily require an answer where more or less absolute claims are made. Perhaps the wisest choice here is to say that this question may be interpreted and analysed in various ways and that this variation is due to the fact that there is not only *one* conception of ethical competence that can be judged to hold everywhere and for everyone. The ideological, political and philosophical processes going on in society and in people's minds will influence which conceptions will be regulative and in focus, for example, in the policy documents relating to the school arena. Perhaps one has to be satisfied with what seems to be an indisputable fact, namely, that a) there are a variety of conceptions of ethical competence existing side by side and b) this is not a problem c) as long as those conceptions do not contradict each other within one and the same ethical language-game.

I believe that this is a reasonable position. Still, regarding the ethics education language-game, there seem to be, if not conflicting, then possibly disharmonious

conceptions of ethical competence working in one and the same assessment context. What is explicitly suggested in the national tests and in the assessment instructions is that linguistic, conceptual, reflective and analytical competence together make up the concept of ethical competence used and referred to within the assessment context, but in the formulation of items and especially in the assessment instructions, it seems clear that two more competences are added: normative competence and action competence.

What is at issue here is, in effect, whether ethics education should make space for action competence in relation to prevalent political, ideological and philosophical processes. I have argued that there are indications in the national tests that action competence is a competence that is relevant to ethics education, even though I would not go as far as stating that these indications make up a wholly structured and detailed ethical philosophy. I have also presented reasons in favour of some of the fundamentals within the capability approach, not least that ethics cannot be, and should not be, limited to an impersonal and rational analysis of ethical concepts, arguments and apprehensions. Ethics is, and ought to be, about personal engagement. This, however, does not exclude, but rather presupposes, the relevance of all the competences mentioned in the discussion above. Nussbaum highlights the intimate relation between reason and emotions and between theoretical reflection and moral practice. There are constructive conclusions to be drawn from this.

Nussbaum can surely contribute to an elaboration of how the newly expressed interest in virtue ethics may be interpreted and what the relevant descriptions in the RE syllabus are intended to refer to, but she is certainly not the only philosopher who has presented ethical philosophies of relevance to the development of ethics education. One fundamental problem with what seems to be a more or less hegemonic approach to what, as was mentioned above, in Sweden is often described as *values education* is that issues and questions raised within the philosophy of values and in philosophical ethics are rarely discussed with reference to what is, and what is thought to be, happening during lessons in such an education. It is as if pedagogical and philosophical dimensions of ethics were conceived as sharply separated, with the consequence that philosophical reflection is seen as being both unnecessary and irrelevant to the arena where teachers and pupils are engaged in discussing moral issues. This is a most unsatisfying situation. As several authors have claimed, values education has to be anchored in philosophical analysis that may contribute to a depth and a width that it would otherwise not be possible to develop and preserve (Gardelli et al. 2014; Hartner 2015).

In an ongoing research project, *What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School*,[7] five of the authors in the present book are examining conceptions of ethical competence to be identified in various empirical sources, for example, national and international policy documents. A frame of reference in the project is constituted by continuous analyses of four ethical theorists who present various philosophical approaches to

issues relating to norms, values and ethics: K.E. Løgstrup, Martha Nussbaum, Seyla Benhabib and Peter Singer. Other philosophers could certainly have been chosen to contribute to a philosophically elaborated analysis of conceptions of ethical competence found in the empirical sources. The point is, however, that if issues regarding conceptions of ethical competence are to be examined with regard to values education in a way that is not merely superficial, one has to dig into certain philosophical questions: What kind of competences are intended to be developed within values education, and which philosophical position on values and on ethics is expressed or implied by this intention?

2.16   Conclusions

According to my view of the matter, the problem with the interpretation of *ethical competence* applied within the ethics education language-game is that the relation between the various conceptions of relevant competences is nontransparent and never problematised. I do not think that a reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing analysis is that ethics in school teaching in principle cannot, and should not, be the object of assessment according to the grading scale that the curriculum prescribes. Rather one has to point out that it is of fundamental importance to place such an assessment within a more comprehensive context where various competences are presented as relevant at the same time as they are related to each other and to the context.

Many philosophers and theologians have emphasised that the core of ethics, the meaning of morals and moral relations, is to care about and engage in promoting other people's existential welfare as well as one's own. The Swedish-Norwegian philosopher Harald Ofstad formulated this in terms of an aim for engagement in moral matters: to be "morally observant" of fellow humans' welfare (Ofstad 1987). The Danish theologian and philosopher of religion Knud Ejler Løgstrup, mentioned above, highlights what he characterises as an "ethical demand" to actively practise a love for one's neighbour, who may be anyone one meets in life. This demand is "absolute" and "silent", always waiting to be applied with respect and care and engagement, and consequently it differs from hypothetical demands that are grounded in the ordinary social norms that make up the relations in human societies (Løgstrup 1997).

Løgstrup's absolute demand is described as being anchored in a divine authority, but in spite of this, it seems to be something that it is relevant to reflect upon in a secular RE context (Franck 2014c). Both he and Ofstad point out that ethics and morals' fundamental and most important dimensions are to be found beyond surface studies about "right" and "wrong", reasons for and against this or that action or critical arguments intended to analyse various ethical issues. What really counts is a personal engagement with other people, with fellow humans in need of help, support, compassion and love. One could say that it is the concept of goodness, rather than righteousness, that comes to the fore – not because questions regarding right

and wrong are not important or are uninteresting but because the fundamental axiom for all ethical analyses and moral arguments is, and ought to be, how to support others and to live a good life oneself.

These conceptions of ethics, though different in many ways, have much in common with Nussbaum's capability approach. And their emphasis on personal engagement, compassion and love as being the indisputable foundations for ethics should be made clear in ethics education in schools. More specifically, it seems that one way to proceed with regard to ethics education and the corresponding national tests is to make clear that what is taught and tested within ethics education and in the tests in question are some general abilities and skills that may be described in terms of linguistic, conceptual, reflective and analytical competence. These competences are general in the sense that they may be applied to other areas within other school subjects. But the most important thing to clarify is that mastery of these competences is not equivalent to being ethical or being moral. Such mastery is, in an instrumental way, important because a moral life where one strives to make room for *eudaimonia* and self-realisation, for oneself and others, requires, for example, normative and argumentative skills. But these skills are only to be seen as important steps on the way to the development of relations marked by care, respect, empathy and love.

If such a transparent presentation of ethics and the role of ethics education were to be given in the classrooms where RE is taught, there would, in principle, be no obstacles in trying to combine support for the development of linguistic, conceptual, reflective and analytical competence, for example, with the help of national tests, with inspiring the pupils to engage in human relations, when aiming for the realisation of conditions that make the development of universal human capabilities possible for others and for oneself.

Nussbaum has, in the capability approach, presented some valuable ideas, which make an important contribution to the search for a strategy for developing ethics education and national tests in a satisfying way, where various competences are allowed to co-operate in the development of the meaning of the concept of ethical competence. This is the visible and constructive conclusion from the foregoing analysis and discussion.

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Chapter 3
Critical Thinking in Students' Ethical Reasoning: A Reflection on Some Examples from the Swedish National Tests in Religious Education

Kristoffer Larsson

Abstract To reason about ethical issues in a thoughtful manner is often seen as a desirable human ability if one is to live a responsible life, both as an individual and as a member of society. Taking its point of departure in Professor of Ethics Daniel Lee's non-confessional approach to ethics education and Professor of Education Robert Ennis's definition of critical thinking, this chapter reflects on manifestations of critical thinking in ninth graders' responses to two tasks concerning ethical issues in the Swedish national tests in religious education. The reflection tries to describe and discuss some critical-thinking skills that are manifested and how these vary among the analysed student responses. The reflection also considers how task design may affect opportunities for students to manifest critical thinking. Further, the reflection discusses whether critical thinking could be a feasible focus point when testing, measuring and assessing students' ethical reasoning, in order to avoid mixing personal and societal ethical values into the processes of testing, measuring and assessing this kind of reasoning.

3.1   Introduction

It could be argued that the development of the ability to reason about ethical questions is at the heart of being able to live a responsible life, both as an individual and as a member of society. Without such an ability, how can a person, and indeed humankind, find responsible ways to deal with issues such as sustainable development, human rights and other decisive issues of today (Paul and Elder 2009: 36, 2010: 37)?

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In Swedish religious education – which is non-confessional – one key component is ethics education (Franck 2014: 188–190, 192–194; Skolverket 2011: 186–187, 189–194). This is basically to be seen, using the terms of Professor of Ethics Daniel Lee (2006: 199, 208), not as an education in ethical indoctrination but as an education in ethical engagement (Löfsted 2011: 115–124; Skolverket 2011: 186–187, 189–194; Osbeck et al. Forthcoming: 3). The latter is roughly defined as an approach 'which emphasizes listening to others in an open-minded manner and coming to carefully considered conclusions only after thoughtful reflections about differing views concerning matters of controversy' (Lee 2006: 199). Many writers (Carlton and Ting 2013: 64; Meisel and Fearon 2006: 149, 151–156), among them Lee (2006: 199, 201–202) and one of the leading authorities on critical thinking (Menssen 1993: 85; Facione 1990: 18), Richard Paul (1988: 11–13), have argued that at the centre of such an approach lies the art of critical thinking, an ability that is at the core of modern Western education (Siegel 2010: 141; Moore 2013: 506; Behar-Horenstein and Niu 2011: 25; Tsui 1998: 1[4]; Larsson 2013: 423).

The purpose of the following chapter is to reflect upon manifestations of critical thinking when students reason about ethical issues in the Swedish national tests in religious education and then to draw upon this to formulate some topics for further discussion.

3.2 Setting the Scene for the Reflection

In this section, I discuss some methodological issues related to my reflection.

3.2.1 Tasks

Two Swedish national tests in religious education were conducted in 2013, one for sixth graders and one for ninth graders. The test for sixth graders included four tasks concerning the ethical dimension of religious education (Skolverket 2013a: 43). The test for ninth graders included three tasks of that kind (Skolverket 2013b: 40). Here I will base my reflection upon students' responses regarding two of the three tasks in the ninth grade test.

I have chosen the responses from these two tasks because they concern the reasoning aspect of the ethical dimension. Furthermore, these tasks were chosen because they were designed as essay tasks, which, compared to a multiple-choice design, give quite a good opportunity to see how the students actually *reason* about the ethical issue at hand (Tsui 1998: 21[18]; Norris 1985: 42, 44; Larsson 2013: 135). That in turn also makes it possible for me to reflect upon manifestations of critical thinking in their ethical reasoning.

As with most ethical issues, the two tasks addressed are of the kind that is usually described as ill-structured problems (Kuhn 1991: 10; King and Kitchener 1994:

10–13), that is, in short, problems or issues where there is no certain answer, and it falls to the individual to make judgements based on reasoning (Kuhn 1991: 10; King and Kitchener 1994: 10–13).

In one of the tasks (for tasks, see Appendix 1), the students were asked to reason about the ethical concept of forgiveness (Skolverket 2013c: 8, see also Chap. 4 in this volume). In the other, the students were asked to reason about the death penalty, taking their point of departure in different ethical ideas, such as deontological ethics (Skolverket 2013d: 16). In both tasks, the students were to draw only on their own previous knowledge and experience. There were no texts[1] that the students were supposed to base their answers upon or to consider in their responses to the tasks (Skolverket 2013c: 8, 2013d: 16).

3.2.2   Students, Answers and Selection

The teachers who conducted the test were, inter alia, asked to send in readable copies of the responses of every student born on the sixth of each month to the University of Gothenburg, who, on behalf of the National Agency for Education, had constructed the test (Skolverket 2013e: 6). From among these responses, I randomly selected 40, only discriminating to ensure an appropriate division between answers from male and female students and to include some answers from students of foreign origin. For each of these 40 responses, I then read thoroughly the responses to the two tasks mentioned above and finally chose some illustrative responses from among these 40 for the above-mentioned purpose of this chapter. In the light of this, the final selection can be described as strategic. The responses I present are thus not representative of Swedish ninth graders in general.

3.2.3   Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an elusive phenomenon, and it has been conceptualised and defined in a variety of ways (Tsui 1998: 5[2]; Petress 2004: 461–466; Phillips and Bond 2004: 278–280; Moore 2013: 507–508; Johnson and Hamby 2015: 417–430). Though some (McPeck 1990: 58) stress the differences in definitions, others (Halpern, (2001)[1993]: 272; Tsui 2006: 201, 2002: 743, 1998: 5[2]; Quellmalz 1987: 87–90) have argued that there is a great deal of consistency in the various ways of defining the phenomenon, not least when they are operationalised in empirical investigations.

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[1]The task about the death penalty contains a short text (Appendix 1). But the task is not about the actual text, and the text cannot in any concrete way be used as support for the reasoning the task calls for, i.e. the students cannot base their thoughts about the death penalty and the different ethical perspectives on the text in any reasonable way.

In this reflection, I take my point of departure from a widely recognised definition formulated by the professor of education and long-standing authority in critical thinking (McMillan 1987: 11; Facione 1990: 18, Menssen 1993: 85), Robert Ennis, who writes that critical thinking is 'reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do' (Ennis 1987: 10, 12, (1993): 180). This is indeed a very dense definition, and Ennis's (1987: 12–15) elaboration consists of more than 150 different specifications. Without giving the full elaboration of the meaning in this context, we can use an abridgement made by Ennis where he states that this involves a person doing most of the following:

1. Judging the credibility of a source
2. Identifying conclusions, reasons and assumptions
3. Judging the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions and evidence
4. Developing and defending a position on an issue
5. Asking appropriate clarifying questions
6. Planning experiments and judging experimental designs
7. Defining terms in a way appropriate for the context
8. Being open-minded
9. Trying to be well informed
10. Drawing conclusions when warranted, but with caution (Ennis 1993: 180)

In light of this definition, some immediate clarifications are warranted in relation to my reflection. Firstly, even though I take this definition as a point of departure, it should be stated that I use it predominantly as an overarching concept to frame and to anchor my thoughts on the students' responses, not as a fine-grained measuring instrument of any sort. Secondly, it should also be stated that merely because of the nature of the tasks, some of the ten abilities in Ennis's list above couldn't reasonably be expected to appear in the students' responses. Among these are 'judging the credibility of a source', 'planning experiments and judging experimental designs' and 'trying to be well informed', although the last of these could perhaps be linked to being in possession of the appropriate factual knowledge for the task.

3.2.4 Analysing Students' Responses

My reflection is based on my analysis of the selected student responses to the two tasks. This analysis set out to trace manifestations of critical thinking in the responses using the specified definition of critical thinking as an overall framework. At a global level, the two key questions in the analysis were 'Can elements of critical thinking be seen in the students' responses to the task?' and if so 'Which elements of critical thinking can be seen?'

There was no intention that the analysis should cover every possible element of critical thinking that can be found in ninth graders' reasoning about the two tasks. The analysis was carried out solely to make an initial reflection on manifestations of critical thinking in students' ethical reasoning and from this to introduce some potentially interesting questions for further discussion. In connection with this, it

may also be of importance to emphasise that the different abilities that are included in critical thinking often intersect and overlap with each other, and there can be legitimate grounds for interpreting the answers differently with regard to which abilities actually manifest themselves (Larsson 2013: 41–42; Gustafsson et al. 2014: 22, 25–27, 30–43, 54–55,64–67, 99–104). It therefore follows that my interpretation of which abilities appear in the responses is neither the only nor the final one. In accordance with the objective of my reflection, and in order to make the presentation clearer, my standpoint here is that I have an obligation to show how the interpretation I make has its foundation in the definition and in the empirical data, rather than reasoning about every other possible interpretation.

3.3 The Reflection, Act I

In this section, I reflect on some of the student responses to the two tasks. I first address the task concerning the death penalty and then the task about forgiveness.

3.3.1 The Death Penalty, Deontological Ethics and Traces of Critical Thinking

It is first necessary to say that the task in question was not only about the death penalty and deontological ethics; it was wider in scope, also including consequentialist and intentionalist ethics in relation to the question. The fact is, however, that the students' responses in general give an impression of unfamiliarity with the different ethical theories. I have therefore limited my reflection to the ethical theory where the students seemed to be able to reason in any depth: deontological ethics. It is also essential to know that in the responses that I have chosen, there is an overall interpretation of the task as being *to reason about how a person with a deontological ethical view would look at the death penalty*. In this context, it should also be stressed that it is only extracts of each student's response that I present below. These students' responses are more extensive and in some cases also concern other ethical viewpoints. Though this is the case, the empirical extracts show *everything* each individual student expresses about deontological ethics and the death penalty.

With this as a background, I will now turn to the students and their actual reasoning. I will start by saying that I find what can be called *traces* of critical thinking in some of the students' reasoning. I use the term traces because what I see in the students' responses, at a global level, are more *indications* of critical-thinking abilities, which can mature and develop, than actual fully fledged critical-thinking abilities. Some of those traces are, however, more evident and developed, while others are quite vague and undeveloped. There are also students for whom reasoning can be described as lacking any direct trace of critical thinking.

In the following section, I will present three empirical examples of what I mean and try to explain how I see them. I will begin with an example of the most distinct and developed trace of critical thinking that I found among the selected responses:

> A deontological ethicist would say that the death penalty is wrong because you can use a rule that 'it is always wrong to kill', which says that the act is wrong regardless of consequences or intention. A deontological ethicist could also say that the death penalty is right and lean on rules like 'an eye for an eye', when he says that if someone committed a murder he should also be killed as punishment. The principle, however, would only justify the death penalty if the perpetrator committed a murder himself. (S1)[2]

In this response, I can see primarily two abilities that could be linked to critical thinking: 'identifying assumptions' and 'being open-minded'. The presence of the first of these is indicated by the fact that the student shows the skill to see that one crucial foundation in a deontological view is the rule or norm itself, and depending on the preferred rule, different stands could be taken on the same issue. The second ability, being open-minded, is revealed when the student shifts from one perspective to another (Ennis 1987: 12). To elaborate, the student explicitly shifts from one rule and one standpoint on the issue (sentence one) to another rule and another standpoint on the issue (sentence two), making it clear that there is not one fixed way to look at the issue from a deontological ethical viewpoint; it all comes down to the preferred rule. Perhaps even the ability 'drawing conclusions when warranted, but with caution', could be seen in this student's response, manifested in the last sentence. Building on the conclusion from the sentence before, in the last sentence, the student shows the ability to make a clarification aimed at determining under which circumstances the proposed conclusion is valid.

If the example discussed here is seen as a sort of norm, the next selected answer (S2) could be said to contain essentially the same two abilities, but in a much more vague and undeveloped way.

> From a deontological perspective the death penalty is wrong. Just because the criminal committed a great moral injustice, we do not need to do it – two wrongs don't make a right. But to let one who is prone to murder again live can be morally wrong, people are endangered. But letting someone die in prison due to life imprisonment is also morally wrong. (S2)

In this answer the student does not, in a clear manner, display an understanding of the deontological assumption regarding the rule and the importance of the preferred rule and the standpoint to be taken on the issue. Rather this is something that could be read into the response. The student could even be said to state initially that there is only one absolute rule and one possible stand from a deontological viewpoint. But in sentence three, the student signals that this is not necessarily the case by introducing – although vaguely – another somewhat opposing rule about 'protecting the people', leading to another possible standpoint concerning the death penalty. If the student's response is interpreted in that way, the student can be seen,

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[2] This student response, and those presented below, has been translated from Swedish to English by the author. An effort has been made to stay as close to the original written response as possible.

though not distinctly and obviously, as exhibiting a hint of the critical-thinking ability 'identifying assumptions'.

The second ability, open-mindedness, could be seen in the student's ability to shift from the initial statement that a deontological approach implies a negative attitude to the death penalty because of the rule 'it's morally wrong to kill another person' to a perspective where the rule 'protecting the people' introduces the possibility of another deontological standpoint on the issue. Even the last sentence could be interpreted in this way. Here the student – indirectly – points to the possibility that even a life sentence could be immoral from a deontological view, because the person is then predestined to die inside the walls of jail. Is this another rule being introduced, that of a person's 'right to freedom', or just a sharpening of the rule 'it's morally wrong to kill another person'? The fact that this question arises underlines the ambiguity and the unclear manner in which the ability to be open-minded is displayed in this student's response.

Compared to the previous empirical extract (S1), there is no specific passage in this response where the shift in perspective is obvious, making it much harder to become aware of any shifts in perspective and the intentions behind them. Still, I would say that such shifts are present, implying that the student displays the critical-thinking ability of being open-minded.

Still using the first example as a norm, I now turn to the third empirical example:

> A deontological ethicist would probably say that the death penalty is wrong because you are not allowed to kill someone. That is a rule and the action must follow that rule. (S3)

In my interpretation, this student's answer demonstrates no skill connected to the two abilities 'identifying assumptions' and 'being open-minded'. Instead of identifying the underlying assumption in the deontological view discussed earlier, this student assumes that, from a deontological point of view, there can only be one absolute rule, leading to one absolute standpoint. The shortcomings in identifying the assumption in question also become visible in connection with the ability to be open-minded. The student shows no skill in shifting perspective and clings to one absolute rule with one absolute standpoint. In addition, there is no obvious display of other critical-thinking abilities in the student's response. I therefore claim that this student's response could be described as lacking any trace of actual critical thinking.

3.3.2   Conclusion

I've now given some empirical examples that suggest that there are various depths and degrees of traces of critical thinking when students reason about how a person with a deontological point of view would look at the issue of the death penalty. There can also be a total lack of any trace of critical thinking in a student's reasoning.

Momentarily returning to Ennis's (1993: 180, 1987: 10, 12) definition of critical thinking as reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do, a student with more profound traces of critical thinking ought to be able to make better and more accurate decisions on what to believe or do with regard to the issue at hand, and a student showing less profound traces should make correspondingly less accurate decisions. While even the most profound traces (S1) are not particularly profound, the *more* profound traces, compared to vague or absent traces, should then create a better opportunity for the student to make a decision about what to believe in relation to a deontological ethical viewpoint on the issue of the death penalty. Indeed, it might even create better opportunities for making decisions on the death penalty more generally, based on the assumption that the traces of the capabilities 'identifying assumptions' and 'being open-minded' could possibly be transferred into dealing with other aspects of the issue.

3.3.3   Forgiveness and Traces of Critical Thinking

The second task revolved around the issue of forgiveness, primarily asking the students to reason from the point of view of both the one asking for forgiveness and the one giving it. When I analysed the selected answers on the task, I found, as with the death penalty task, what I referred to above as *traces* of critical thinking. And as with the death penalty task, those traces could be more or less distinct and developed or even be lacking.

With the above as a short preamble, I will now introduce four different empirical examples and describe my interpretation of them in terms of critical thinking. I begin with the response that I see as the one that displays the most profound traces of critical thinking among those selected:

> Forgiving someone can be both difficult but also a relief. When you have forgiven someone, you can of course be a little mad at the person but you should be able to be together, talk and socialise.
>
>   I think it is easier to forgive than to ask for forgiveness. It requires more courage to swallow one's pride and ask for forgiveness and admit that one has done something wrong. To be asked to forgive can of course also be tough. It depends on what one is supposed to forgive. It is harder to forgive the murderer who killed your son than it is to forgive your brother when he slapped you. But to forgive is essential. /…/
>
>   If everyone in the world forgave each other and thought of other things than violence and revenge, the world would be much better. There would be fewer wars and conflicts. So many people would benefit, if people began to forgive each other! (S4)

According to my interpretation, there are primarily two abilities connected to critical thinking displayed in this student's answer. These are the ability 'to be open-minded' and the ability 'to develop and defend a position on an issue'. I first turn to the ability to be open-minded, made explicit in the student's skill in shifting perspective (Ennis 1987: 12). This shift is primarily made in two ways. On the one hand, the student shifts from the perspective of the one asking for forgiveness to the

one giving it (mainly paragraph two); on the other hand, the student shifts from the perspective of two individuals (paragraph one/two) to the perspective of society (paragraph three).

The display of the other ability, 'developing and defending a position on an issue', is perhaps a bit more intricate and disputable. What speaks for its presence is that the student evinces a skill in making some more exact and developed claims when arguing from the different perspectives. For example, following sentence five, such claims are made in connection with discussing the role of the forgiver: 'It depends on what one is supposed forgive. It is harder to forgive the murderer who killed your son than it is to forgive your brother when he slapped you'. From my point of view, this kind of claim could be seen as displaying the ability to develop a position on the issue at hand, i.e. forgiveness, and also gives some clues about how the student might defend his or her view on this specific issue.

Using the example presented as a norm, I now direct attention to the second empirical example:

> If someone has done something that is considered wrong, or something that hurt someone else, it is good to ask for forgiveness from the person or persons affected. One then shows that one is truly repentant, and wants to do the right thing. Simply, one asks for another chance. It is important to get another chance, since everyone occasionally does something wrong, and you should not be judged for life due to one little wrongdoing.
>
> To forgive someone is therefore also important. One has to accept that people make mistakes sometimes, even those close to you. One must be able to give people another chance. However, you should probably not forgive someone too many times. If someone hurts you again and again, then maybe it's time to stop forgiving and move on. Or if someone has done something really horrible, e.g. murdered, you should probably not forgive so easily. (S5)

In this student's response, the two abilities 'being open-minded' and 'developing and defending a position on an issue' are also displayed. However, compared to the first example, in this response, the display of the ability to be open-minded is more restricted. This can be seen from the fact that the shift in perspective is made solely between the one asking for forgiveness and the one giving it, the societal perspective being absent.

The second ability is shown in the different claims made when arguing from the asker's and the giver's points of view. Compared to the first empirical example (S4), it can be pointed out that this ability is perhaps even a little bit more developed in the answer in question (S5). This is particularly true in the case of the forgiver, where the student makes some additional distinctions in his or her claims (paragraph two, sentences two to six) in comparison to the student in the first empirical extract (S4).

I now turn to the third example:

> If you have done something wrong and ask for forgiveness you show that you are mature and that you can admit your errors. If you ask for forgiveness and the person you ask accepts your request, this demonstrates that both have moved on. So it is important for both people involved to forgive or ask for forgiveness. (S6)

My interpretation is that this student's answer can be said to contain one of the abilities discussed in relation to the previous examples, namely, the ability 'being open-minded'. This is evinced in the same restricted way as in the previous empirical extract (S5) and is displayed in the ability to shift from the perspective of the one asking for forgiveness to the perspective of the one giving it (sentences one and two).

The absence of the ability to 'develop and defend a position on an issue' is clear, in that this student's answer does not display any skill in making more developed and distinct claims when shifting between the asker's and the giver's points of view. What is presented in relation to the perspectives is merely very brief and quite imprecise utterances, as in the case of the forgiver: '[If the forgiver] accepts your request, this demonstrates that both have moved on'. This makes it impossible to draw any decisive conclusion on how this student would develop and defend a position on the issue of forgiveness.

Still using the first example as a norm, I finally direct attention to the fourth empirical example:

It's important to forgive each other because everybody makes mistakes occasionally. (S7)

In this student's response, neither of the two previously discussed abilities can be seen. The shift from one perspective to another, which indicates open-mindedness, is absent. The answer is in a way so terse that it is very hard to even establish any one clear perspective from which the student approaches the issue. And although the student laconically states an opinion in saying 'It's important to forgive each other because everybody makes mistakes occasionally', this could not, in any way, be described as a display of the ability to *develop* and *defend* a position on the issue of forgiveness. In sum, it is my interpretation that this student's response lacks any trace of actual critical thinking.

3.3.4   Conclusion

As with the issue of the death penalty, I have given empirical examples that indicate that there are differences in the depth and degree of traces of critical thinking in the students' reasoning about forgiveness, with some students' reasoning even lacking any trace whatsoever.

As before, a similar conclusion could also be drawn in relation to Ennis's (1993: 180, 1987: 10, 12) definition of critical thinking. That is, more profound traces of critical thinking, as in the first example (S4), ought to give better grounds for accurate and reasonable decisions on what to *believe* in relation to the issue of forgiveness and, perhaps in this case, even what to *do* when faced with a situation concerning forgiveness. However, the latter is just a presumed conclusion based on the idea that a more thought-through and more complex conception of forgiveness, including weighing up multiple perspectives and making claims for one position, also generates a greater preparedness for a more moderate and balanced action.

3.4   The Reflection, Act II

Thus far I've shown that critical thinking is present when students reason about ethical questions in the Swedish national tests in religious education. Further, I've said that what is present seems to consist of traces of critical-thinking abilities, not the full-blown abilities. I also described which of the specific critical-thinking abilities I interpreted as being the most visible in relation to the tasks in question. Additionally, I suggested that there are differences in the depth and degree of the traces of those abilities among the students, some having more profound traces, some having vague traces and some even lacking such traces. According to the definition of critical thinking being used, I have also claimed that those differences result in uneven opportunities for students to make well-grounded decisions on what to believe (and do) in relation to the issues dealt with in the tasks.

With this as a base, I would now like to introduce three further topics with a bearing on students' critical thinking when reasoning about ethical issues. The first one connects more directly to the specific tasks discussed above and concerns the nature of the tasks. The second and the third are more general: the second deals with the possibility of making test, measurement and assessment of ethical reasoning less controversial by targeting the critical-thinking aspect of such reasoning; the third deals with some definition issues.

Starting with the first, it seems possible, as proposed above, to identify critical thinking in the students' reasoning about the ethical issues in the two tasks. However, even the more profound traces of critical thinking found in the responses must be described as quite limited. In relation to this, one can ask several questions. The question I am considering here is whether this could in some way be related to the character of the task. The two tasks are presented in a straightforward manner without any obvious support regarding information about the issues that are to be discussed, that is to say without any text[3] to base the reasoning on. This means that factual knowledge brought into the reasoning must be based solely on the students' previous knowledge. In my opinion, this could be somewhat of a problem if one wants to see how far the students can take their actual reasoning (here, their critical thinking). If students lack factual knowledge of the issue that is to be discussed, it is not possible for them to develop their thoughts in a substantial manner, and thus their ability to think critically about the issue does not show; this is not self-evidently due to poor critical-thinking abilities but due to a lack of factual knowledge of the issue.

This problem could, in my opinion, be highlighted in connection to both tasks discussed. The problem is most evident in relation to the task about the death penalty. As I said earlier, when discussing the circumstances surrounding this task, it was not possible to analyse the students' reasoning on the death penalty in relation to consequentialist and intentionalist ethics because the students demonstrate a lack of familiarity with these perspectives. Even the analysis of the deontological

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[3] See footnote 1.

perspective shows, in my opinion, clear deficiencies concerning their knowledge about the perspective in itself, which is, in turn, revealed in the quite limited traces of critical thinking here. If one wants to enable the students to show their critical-thinking abilities in a more profound way, it could therefore be fruitful to devise possible ways to manage the problem of previous factual knowledge. The simplest device, which I have tested in empirical research with good results (Larsson 2011, 2013), is to give the students fairly short texts to base their thoughts on. These texts, however, must be well adapted to such considerations as the age of the students, if one is to avoid making reading ability the decisive factor, which would simply replace one problem with another.

Now before turning to the second topic, I first need to return to the initial suggestion, as advocated by Lee (2006: 199, 201–202) and Paul (1988: 11–13), among others (Carlton and Ting 2013: 64; Meisel and Fearon 2006: 149, 151–156), and taken as point of departure in this reflection, namely, critical thinking is the core of good ethical reasoning. If this is to be taken seriously, it follows that the quality of critical thinking ought to be directly linked to the standard of ethical reasoning. Thus more profound and developed traces of critical thinking are linked to more advanced ethical reasoning, while poor or absent traces of critical thinking are linked to varying degrees of deficiency in such reasoning. Without jumping to conclusions and exaggerating, there is also support for this in the empirical extracts discussed above, comparing, for example, S4 and S7 in the task about forgiveness.

If that suggestion is accepted, it follows, in relation to the second topic, that it should be possible to address matters concerning testing, measuring and assessing students' ethical reasoning, which is to say students' reasoning about ethical issues, from a critical-thinking point of view. One could of course ask why should this be done. My main point here is that ethical issues in themselves contain conflicting and controversial values and solutions, which in turn make them troublesome where testing, measuring and assessment are concerned. That is because it is hard for those who are involved in testing, measuring and assessing to act from a neutral ethical standpoint (which would be desirable from Lee's ethical engagement approach to ethical education) without concern for certain ethical values of a personal or societal character (Paul 1988: 11–19; Lee 2006: 203–207).

In line with the standpoint that critical thinking is at the heart of ethical reasoning, however, one possible way to try to overcome this problem could be to test measure and assess the critical-thinking aspects of the ethical reasoning. That is not to say that it is easy to do those things in relation to critical thinking[4] but that such an approach at least creates an opportunity to try to remove those features of the testing, measuring and assessing that are potentially tainted with personal and societal ethical points of view and direct attention solely to the students' reasoning capacity, as seen from a critical-thinking perspective. As Paul states it:

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[4] For more on difficulties in assessing and measuring critical thinking, see, for instance, Ennis (2008).

Critical thinking does not compel or coerce students to come to any particular substantive moral conclusion or to adopt any particular substantive moral point of view. Neither does it imply moral relativism, for it emphasizes the need for the same high intellectual standards in moral reasoning and judgment that are the foundation of any bona fide domain of knowledge. (Paul 1988: 14)

Finally, I want to address some ambiguities surrounding the definition of some of the concepts that have been central in my reflection. These ambiguities, I would argue, have their origins in the underlying assumption that critical thinking constitutes the core of the ethical engagement approach and therefore also of ethical reasoning, meaning that better critical thinking equals more advanced ethical reasoning and poorer or absent critical thinking equals less advanced ethical reasoning. If this is so, critical thinking could be claimed to define the standard of ethical reasoning, with the reasonable conclusion that critical thinking somehow then defines ethical reasoning, with ethical reasoning simply being critical thinking that is directed towards issues of an ethical nature. In line with this kind of argument, one can ask whether there is anything that should really be called ethical reasoning and reasoning about ethical issues or whether critical thinking is the only concept to be used.

Another cause of this ambiguity is evident if attention is directed towards Lee's definition of the ethical engagement approach and Ennis's definition of critical thinking. Lee (2006: 199), on the one hand, states that the ethical engagement approach implies an educational standpoint where people should be allowed to, and even be taught to, deal with issues of an ethical nature 'in an open-minded manner and coming to carefully considered conclusions only after thoughtful reflections about differing views concerning matters of controversy'. Ennis (1987: 12), on the other hand, states that critical thinking is 'reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do', with one subcategory of this definition saying that this implies being open-minded, meaning, for instance, to 'consider seriously other points of view than one's own' and 'reason from premises with which one disagrees'. What exactly is the difference between those two definitions, other than that they are said by Lee and Ennis to define different things? Of course one can argue that there is a difference in the wording and, if studied as a whole, Ennis's (1987: 12–15) definition is presented in a more thoroughgoing way, *but* in essence they are almost interchangeably similar, I would claim, making it very hard, if not impossible, to make proper and valid distinctions between the two.

As no further conclusions on the question of ambiguity in definitions in this context have been reached, it is evident that the question is of future concern. If one wants to promote an education where ethical issues are approached with openness and without indoctrination, the question of the definitions employed in such an approach needs to be taken seriously – because fuzziness in definitions leads to the risk of introducing fuzziness throughout, opening the approach up to avoidable criticism.

3.5   Closing the Curtain

In the present chapter, a non-confessional approach to ethics education, where critical thinking is seen as a core competency, has served as a basis for a reflection on manifestations of critical thinking in student responses to two tasks concerning ethical issues, in the Swedish national tests in religious education. The reflection has centred on the character of these manifestations and demonstrated that there are what have been termed traces of critical thinking in the students' responses and that these traces differ in the degree of complexity between different students, ranging from no traces to more developed traces. In relation to the definition of critical thinking used, it has also been suggested there that these differences may lead to potential differences in students' abilities to decide what to believe or do in relation to these ethical issues. From a test and assessment perspective, the reflection has also touched upon ways in which design may affect the possible manifestations of critical thinking and how a focus on testing and assessing the critical-thinking aspect of students' ethical reasoning can be used as a basis for improving tests and assessments of students' ethical competence in a non-confessional context.

The reflection made in the current chapter should only be seen as an outline of ideas for further consideration and possible empirical studies. Although questions that point to a larger context have not been the focus of this reflection, such questions could indeed be asked. One of the most important of these, and one that deserves attention in the future, is that the analysed student responses indicate that the Swedish school system might have a limited and varied success in preparing individuals to reflect upon and, ultimately, to deal with ethical issues, an ability that was initially described as central to living a responsible life. This suggests that the national test, in this respect, can serve as more than an instrument to be used in trying to determine students' ethical 'knowledge'. It could possibly also be used as a basis for changes, to improve the education system at macro-, meso- and micro-levels in order to reduce differences between individuals and to strengthen the overall ability in individuals to succeed in living an ethically responsible life. In the long run, this is something that might enable (Swedish) society in general to, perhaps, better cope with questions of sustainable development, human rights and many others of tomorrow's more decisive issues.

Appendix 1

Task 12 (Forgiveness)

The word forgiveness is an important ethical concept. Perhaps you have forgiven someone or experienced being forgiven.

Discuss why forgiveness can be important both for the one asking for forgiveness and the one forgiving.

Task 25 (The death penalty)
Read the text below which deals with an ethical issue. Then solve the task below.

The Death Penalty: Right or Wrong?
The last execution in Sweden occurred in 1910. Johan Alfred Ander, who was convicted of a brutal murder, was executed early one morning in November at Långholmen in Stockholm. In Sweden, as in many other countries, the death penalty has now been abolished. However, it is still being used in several countries, for instance, China and the USA.

In newspapers and online, you can read about horrible crimes almost on a daily basis. For example, it could be about mass murder or serious sexual crimes. In these contexts, sometimes the issue of the death penalty comes up. Some say that the death penalty should be reintroduced in Sweden, while others say that it is the wrong way to go.

Discuss whether the death penalty is right or wrong. You should use the ethical models from the previous task in your discussion. Be aware that the same model can be used to argue both for and against the death penalty.

If you want, you can start your text with one of the following sentences:

- Whether the death penalty is right or wrong is something that can be discussed. A consequentialist ethicist would probably say ….
- A deontological ethicist would presumably say ….
- I think that an intentionalist ethicist probably ….

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Chapter 4
Teachers' Experiences of Ethics in Religious Education

Annika Lilja

Abstract   In Sweden ethics is a part of religious education (RE), and since 2013 all pupils in year nine take a national test in one of the four subjects in the social sciences, i.e. geography, history, RE or civics/social studies. One fourth of the pupils, about 25,000 per year, take the test in RE, of which ethics is a part. Since 2011, when Sweden introduced a new syllabus in all subjects, the national test examines in a sense both the pupils' skills and the teaching.

As ethics is a subject that gets relatively little attention during teacher education in RE, and as ethics, as a school subject, involves some conflict, it is interesting to investigate how teachers regard ethics and how they handle both the teaching and the assessment. The conflict mentioned above can be described as an opposition between one purpose of the subject that it is supposed to provide pupils with knowledge about moral codes that are perceived as right and praiseworthy and the overall goal in schools to raise citizens who are critical, questioning and able to think creatively and outside the box. It is also interesting to investigate how national tests in RE affect the teachers' experiences of ethics.

For this study, seven Swedish elementary school teachers, teaching RE in grade 9, have been interviewed about their teaching in ethics. The aim of this chapter is to describe their experiences of ethics, that is, how they talk about ethics as content in RE and about what the national tests have meant to their teaching in ethics and to their assessment of pupils' abilities in ethics.

4.1   Ethics as a School Subject

In addition to dealing with world religions and other world views [*livsåskådningar*], RE also highlights life issues [*livsfrågor*] and ethics. The curriculum from 2011 has been criticised with regard to the syllabuses for the four subjects in the social

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sciences, especially RE. Some researchers argue that the perceptions of knowledge that are expressed in the curriculum have changed the focus from a practical knowledge to a more theoretical knowledge (Franck 2013). The change in perspective can also, according to Franck, be described as a transformation from a hermeneutic view to a more positivistic view on knowledge.

The syllabus for RE states that the teaching in ethics is supposed to involve discussions of concepts and analyses in relation to ethical models. But Franck (2013) considers that it is important to interpret this in a way that makes it possible to use the analytical structures as a means to develop ethical reflection and knowledge. This is in order to give the pupils opportunities to develop an ability to argue independently in an ethical way and to act morally. There is no explicit correlation between the syllabus for RE and assessing whether pupils' actions are ethical, i.e. the teachers are not supposed to assess whether and how the pupils behave in an ethical way. What is to be assessed is how the pupils reason and argue about ethics in different situations.

Another discussion about ethics that is sometimes highlighted is that ethics education is aimed at imparting knowledge about moral codes that are regarded as right and praiseworthy, as well as knowledge about moral codes in relation to which no definite opinion is prioritised as universally preferable or tenable for moral choice and action (Osbeck et al. 2015). This, and the fact that ethics can be seen as a normative subject (Osbeck et al. 2015; Franck 2013), can be regarded as challenges for teachers in RE.

In a study about values education in Sweden and Turkey (Thornberg and Oguz 2013), it is noted that the main method used by the teachers in the study, when it comes to values education, is to be a good role model as a teacher in the interaction with the pupils. The teachers in the study saw values education as something they had to do in addition to their ordinary practice. This ordinary practice was to teach different school subjects. Only some of the teachers associated values education with the content in different school subjects. This is something that Veugelers (2000) also confirms in a study where he examines different ways of teaching values. When teachers work with different educational concepts, such as value education or critical thinking, the teachers see these concepts as special programmes that are separate from the regular syllabus. Ideas about how to act as a role model were built upon values that the teachers had obtained from their parents. Thornberg and Oguz (2013) also report that the teachers in their study did not problematise phenomena such as, for example, implicit values, norm oppression or social reproduction. According to Veugelers (2000), some ways of teaching values, for example, critical thinking and moral development, advocate that the teacher should take a value-neutral position. This position can be recommended but is impossible to adopt in reality, as the teacher always expresses values when teaching. To be able to express differences in a conscious way, it is important that teachers are aware of their own values. The pupils in Veugelers' (2000) study prefer a strategy where teachers express differences but are clear about their own values and preferences.

Another result of the study by Thornberg and Oguz (2013) is that the teachers do not use a scientific metalanguage when they speak about values education; instead

they use everyday language that is based on concrete incidents and feelings. Thornberg and Oguz also point out that an academic profession is characterised by the possession of a common scientific knowledge base, and since teachers do not have this academic and theoretical language, the work is only a semi-profession.

4.2   National Tests and Assessment

The aims of the national tests in Sweden are mainly to support equivalent and fair assessment and grading in the country and to provide data for an analysis of the extent to which the knowledge requirements are fulfilled on different levels. Every year the tests are evaluated by teachers, and generally, their impressions of the tests are positive when it comes to such aspects as degree of difficulty, correspondence between the curriculum and the tests and correspondence between the teaching and the tests (Skolverket 2014).

One important part of the material that is produced in connection with the national tests is the assessment instructions. As the name indicates, these contain instructions for the teacher on how to assess the tests. Each task in the tests is commented on, and there are also samples of genuine answers from pupils who have carried out the tasks during the process of creating the tests. There is one answer for the E-level, one for the C-level and one for the highest level, A. These comments and the pupils' answers are intended to promote equivalence in assessment among all teachers in RE. The assessment instructions are also a concretisation of the curriculum.

From Osbeck et al. (2015), it appears that the process of assessment is a complex one. In discussions about assessment in school in general, it is often supposed that this is something that it is easy for the teachers to do. It just involves making out a test, correcting it and then grading it. None of these steps are easy. When it comes to the national tests in Sweden, they are ready-made and handed to the teachers to administer in their classes. There are also ready-made instructions for the teachers on how to assess the tests. Even so, there can be challenges when assessing the tests (Osbeck et al. 2015). One challenge noted in the study was that the different qualities of knowledge in ethics are not obvious despite the assessment instructions. The teachers were, for example, concerned about how to understand and interpret the meaning of the ethical concepts that the pupils were supposed to show an understanding of. Another challenge was that some of the assessing teachers had additional or alternative ideas about qualities of knowledge in ethics. Sometimes these ideas had consequences for the outcomes of the assessment. The ideas concerned both the content and the form. The third challenge was that the teachers felt torn between their commission and the pupils, who are dependent on the teacher's assessment. The teachers felt for the pupils and, by reading the underlying intentions of pupils whose written answers are hard to understand, the teachers show that they want the best for the pupils. Another challenge identified when assessing religious and moral education is that teachers fail to assess religious knowledge (Grant

and Matemba 2013). The teachers in this study were more interested in generic skills, such as listening, working in groups and enthusiasm.

Sadler (2009) differentiates between so-called analytic grading and holistic grading. In analytic grading, the teacher makes separate qualitative judgements on each of several preset criteria. Holistic grading implies that the teacher takes into account specific aspects of the student's answer but also the quality of the whole. According to Sadler (2009), the criteria play a clear front-end framing role in analytic grading, while in holistic grading, the assessor's emergent global judgement dominates. Sadler (2009) suggests that, in a hypothetical situation where all of the pupils' work is assessed without human error, analytic and holistic assessment would produce different end grades for many tasks. The reason for this is that analytic grading often fails to capture special characteristics, which a good holistic grading could capture. On the other hand, van der Schaaf et al. (2012) found that when teachers used assessment criteria, the quality of their judgements slightly improved. They based their judgements significantly less on personal characteristics of pupils than the teachers without assessment criteria. Baylock (2006) emphasises that it is a problem when knowledge in RE is assessed according to numerical scales. These scales are often more suited to learning objectives such as those in, for example, science and mathematics. RE requires an assessment that is able to provide a clear or rounded picture of what pupils have achieved in learning. To solve this problem, Baylock suggests strategies for assessment that tend towards assembling a broad and textured picture of the pupil's achievement. This can be compared to what Sadler calls a holistic way of assessing.

It is supposed that when assessing the tasks in the national test, the teachers carry out an analytic grading. The tasks about ethics in the test are to be assessed in relation to preset criteria from the syllabus for RE. During the assessment of the tests, the teacher grades each task the pupils have done and uses these grades to determine the grade for the whole test. The national tests are not examinations but a part of the information collected by teachers about the pupils' knowledge. When assessing ethics as a topic in RE over the whole school year, the teachers probably use holistic assessment, of which the national tests are one part.

4.3   Lifeworld Phenomenology as a Way to Understand Teachers' Experiences of Ethics

For this study, a lifeworld phenomenological approach (Bengtsson 2013) has been chosen to develop the research object. The lifeworld theory is part of the phenomenological movement. The lifeworld is the reality that we all live in and take for granted; it is something more than just the physical things that exist in the world (Bengtsson 2013). For this study two concepts are pertinent when it comes to interpreting the teacher interviews about ethics: the concept of *useful things* developed

by Martin Heidegger and the concept *horizon* as it has been developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The concept of useful things contributes to an understanding of how the teachers use the national tests and the assessment instructions in their teaching and how they use the assessment instructions in relation to the pupils. The concept horizon, on the other hand, helps to show how the teachers understand the content of ethics and how they assess the pupils' ability in relation to the national tests and the assessment instructions. In addition, the pupils' understanding of what they are supposed to learn and how their work is assessed is important in order for the teaching to be successful.

All human activity is dependent on useful things (Hyltegren 2014). According to Heidegger (1993), it is not possible to understand something as a useful thing until the meaningful context is understood. Seeing something as a useful thing means that it is perceived as having a certain function. The national test in religious education and the assessment instructions have a special meaning for the teachers since they are familiar with the context of school, tests and assessment. The risk with all useful things, including national tests and assessment instructions, is that the useful thing can be obscured, i.e. something does not show itself as it has the potential to do. According to Hyltegren (2014), this may explain why some teachers perceive the national curriculum to be well defined and others perceive it to be unclear.

The concept horizon is commonly used in phenomenology (Friberg 2005). Every experience has its own horizons and the human being experiences the world from these. Merleau-Ponty (2008) uses the concept by linking horizons to people's experience of time and space. An experience has an inner horizon of possible properties and a range of possibilities. There are also outer horizons that limit experiences (Friberg 2005). A person who acts can make another person see the world in a new way; items surrounding the person who is acting give a new meaning to the observer (Bengtsson 2001). For example, the National Agency of Education can, by means of the national tests and the assessment instructions, influence teachers to look at ethics in a new way. This process can also occur between the teacher and the pupil. Berndtsson (2001) sees one horizon of possibilities and one horizon of actions. The horizon of possibilities implies that the individual sees possibilities and choices. The horizon of action implies that the individual choses to turn to and act in the world. The teachers in this study necessarily encounter the national tests and the assessment instructions; it is a part of their job that they cannot avoid. But how they understand them and how they chose to use them is up to each teacher.

4.4 The Teachers and the Interviews

Seven teachers participated in this study, four women and three men. They were selected because they teach pupils from grade 6 or 7 to grade 9 in Swedish elementary schools. They teach social science subjects, and in some cases the teacher also

teaches another subject. Another reason that these teachers were selected is that they all work in different schools in different types of areas.

The design and the nature of the phenomenon being studied determine the method that provides the best opportunities to describe things as they appear, and in this study the method used is interviews.

The interviews took place in each teacher's school; they were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews were semi-structured (Kvale 1997). This means that a set of questions has been used as a basis for the discussion, but since the interviews were more like a conversation, the questions have not been discussed in the same order in all seven interviews. The interpretations have been carried out from the written texts. As an interpretation methodology, hermeneutics has been used. Parts of Gadamer's (2005) and Ricoeur's (2009) theories are used together with theories from Heidegger (1993) and Merleau-Ponty (2008). Interpretation can be compared to understanding in a different way, seeing things from a different perspective (Berndtsson 2001).

As van Manen (2014, p. 58) puts it, "The value of phenomenology is that it prioritizes how the human being experiences the world". Often phenomenology is regarded as a theory that is predominantly descriptive. This is one aim of this chapter: to describe how seven teachers talk about ethics as a school subject and about the assessment of ethics. Another aim is to draw conclusions from the teachers' statements and to discuss how different conceptions of ethics appear in the material. Because of this, interviews were considered to offer the best opportunity to make teachers' experiences of ethics visible. Interviews necessarily involve a retrospective view of teaching, and it is the teachers who decide what to comment on. The intention with this study is therefore to describe and interpret things as they appear in the interviews with the teachers.

4.5 Results

The results in this chapter have emerged from the teachers' descriptions of ethics as a school subject. When interpreting the transcriptions from the seven interviews, three distinct areas have appeared, and the results of this study are organised around these. The first part is about how the seven teachers describe how they perceive ethics in RE, the second part is about how they talk about the national tests in RE and the third part is about their assessment of ethics. Quotations that are regarded as describing how the teachers experience the three areas have been chosen, aiming to enable the reader of this text to get a nuanced picture of the material. The fourth part of the results describes how the teachers' comments can be understood from a lifeworld theoretical point of view.

4.5.1   Teachers' Description of Ethical Competence and the Subject of Ethics

One of the areas that the interviews concerned was the teachers' experiences in relation to ethical competence, both from their personal point of view and from a professional point of view. The teachers also talked about how they understand the subject ethics and what they teach about.

4.5.1.1   The Teachers' Personal Views on Ethical Competence

When asked what ethical competence means for them personally, all the teachers answered in similar ways: the teachers in the study consider that it is about having your own opinion about what is right and wrong in a situation and having your own thoughts about this opinion. Their comments however vary a bit when it comes to how they express what underlies the decisions.

> You know instinctively what is right or wrong and what to do in a special situation regardless of whether it is legally correct. (Teacher 3)
>
> To be able to reason about what is right and wrong and not only repeat what your mother or father said when you were ten. That you are able to think why you should act like this or like that. (Teacher 6)
>
> To act according to some values. (Teacher 7)

The first statement expresses the idea that it is instinct that guides a person when it comes to judging what is right and wrong. The second statement highlights a more critical point of view – that you should be able to act in a conscious way – and the third statement represents a way of being able to act according to certain values.

4.5.1.2   The Teachers' Views on What Ethics as a School Subject Is About

Ethical competence is, according to the seven teachers, being able to choose a particular way to act in situations that are about right or wrong. As the word competence implies, it is about an ability to do something. When it comes to ethics as a school subject, the teachers' descriptions differ a bit from their description of how they see ethical competence in general. Ethics as a school subject is described as relating to an ability to argue theoretically.

When the teachers explain what they want their pupils to have the opportunity to learn about ethics, here too their views are similar to each other, in the sense that they highlight certain ethical models as something the pupils must have knowledge about.

> Actually it [ethics] is about value questions and how to face them. This is what ethics in the teaching becomes, at least that is how I thought earlier, but now with the new curriculum, it is more about ethical models, which is clearer than earlier and makes it more theoretical.

Consequently, not only thinking in your own way, but having models for these things. (Teacher 1)

They [the pupils] are very interested in ethics, in ethics and morality and ethical dilemmas and reasoning about difficult questions. I think the pupils are very interested in this. But perhaps the focus has ended up being more on the theories and the ethical models. (Teacher 2)

Well…it is a bit two-fold. Partly I think that if I read the curriculum it says that they [the pupils] should be able to use some concepts and some kind of model, so I think that in a way I must act according to that. The other part is a bit more loose…or however you say it. I want them to be good citizens that act in a correct way and are good fellow human beings. These are the two pictures I have to try to combine in my teaching. (Teacher 3)

The content that fills the seven teachers' lessons in ethics is thus about ethical dilemmas, and that part of the teaching engages the pupils. All seven teachers say that their pupils like to discuss ethical dilemmas; it is engaging and it is easy for the pupils to recognise themselves in the dilemmas. They can relate to them personally.

That's the best. When they are asked to think on their own. When I read, we have a little book 'Ethical dilemmas', they are very engaged. And they find their own, they are asked to go home and look in the newspaper to find their own [dilemmas]. Hinduism and Buddhism can be very exciting because they are exotic cultures, but this is closer to them. (Teacher 5)

The teachers consider the ethical models to be harder for some pupils to learn.

Well,…in a way, the ethical models can be a way to show different…, why you reason as you do in different ethical dilemmas, but for the pupils who have difficulties with thinking in an abstract way, they [the ethical models] are hard to understand and to use. I noticed that some pupils had a hard time with this, but yes it [ethics] became quite a bit harder. (Teacher 2)

4.5.1.3   The Position and Extent of Ethics in the Social Sciences

Since the new national curriculum for the Swedish elementary school was introduced in 2011, the seven interviewed teachers teach about ethics for a few weeks at a time. Earlier, some of the teachers say, they discussed ethical dilemmas only now and then in RE, history or civics. Now ethics gets more time, mostly in grade 9 when the teachers think that the pupils are more mature.

It [ethics] is often a part of the teaching in the social sciences; even if you don't think 'now it is ethics', it comes in. It is a bit undefined for the kids, and perhaps I am not always so clear and say that now it is about ethics. But it comes in, 'Is this right?', if they then take a standpoint and question it, then it actually is about ethics, even if you haven't told them before that it is about ethics. I also usually have a part where I present the ethical models.

Do you use some particular questions when you teach about this?

Yes, I use animal testing, the military, if you get an order to shoot even though you don't want to, and yes, of course the death penalty, human rights and the right to life. But also more everyday questions like lying and telling on a friend. (Teacher 4)

"I often weave it [ethics] into civics because I think they go hand in hand". (Teacher 5)

According to the seven teachers, ethics is also a part of history and civics, not only RE. In history, some of the teachers say that it is suitable and natural to talk about ethics when it comes to teaching about the Second World War and the concentration camps in Germany and Poland. In civics, ethics is also an important element, for example, in relation to law and justice in society and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

4.5.1.4 Ethics and Normativity

Ethics can be seen as normative, and when asking the seven teachers about what they think of this idea, they agree, but since they have open discussions about different ethical dilemmas with the pupils, where everyone is allowed to highlight their point of view without being judged, the teachers consider that they overcome the potential problems with normative content.

> You can see it as normative, but I do not think it has to be normative. It is up to the teacher to open up and make the pupils aware of what is what. You do not have to use the word normative, you can use questioning, 'Does it have to be like this?', and have a discussion about it too. (Teacher 1)

During the interviews some of the teachers also said that they want their pupils to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, to be able to treat other people in a good way and to be able to act correctly in different situations in life.

> I think ethics is about how to treat others, not only about right and wrong, but how you actually act in practice. So ethical competence is then about being able to relate to other people in a good way. (Teacher 1)
>   … all this about women's rights in society and what you have the right to do, your own personal freedom. I have no concrete examples, but when it comes to this kind of question I feel that my standpoint can be extra important for some of the girls in the class. (Teacher 5)

In these comments, the teachers talk about, for example, *right*, *wrong*, *good* and *personal freedom* as though it is obvious what these ethical concepts stand for.

To sum up this section, the teachers describe ethical competence as an ability to act in the right way and to know upon which grounds a decision is made and also to understand that people take different standpoints depending on their different points of view. The teaching, on the other hand, aims to give the pupils opportunities to learn a theoretical ability to analyse different dilemmas using different ethical models. The teachers see no problem with the fact that ethics can be perceived as normative; this is something the teachers handle by means of open discussions with the pupils. The teachers also say that there is more time for ethics in their teaching since the new curriculum was introduced in 2011.

4.5.2   The National Tests in Religious Education

In Sweden the pupils in grade 9 take national tests in five subjects during the spring term. These start at the beginning of February and last until the end of May. There is a discussion among politicians, researchers and teachers about whether this is the best way to attain better and more equivalent results in school. Four months of the last term in elementary school are mainly given over to national tests instead of regular teaching.

The four subjects in the social sciences (geography, history, RE and civics) were the latest subjects where a national test was introduced. The first test was given in the spring term of 2013. The interviews in this study took place when the national tests in the social sciences had been given twice.

4.5.2.1   The Teachers' Views on Why the National Tests in RE Are Important

All of the seven teachers are pleased with the fact that there are now national tests in the social sciences, and they are also pleased with the way the tests are created.

> I think it is very good, I am so happy that we finally got national tests in the social sciences too. Those universities that create the tests present how they regard the subject and how to assess it. (…) I think it is good to have a guide that all teachers relate to. (Teacher 6)

The teachers highlight some different aspects of how the national tests have influenced them and their ways of planning and carrying out teaching in ethics. The national tests indicate what ethical content is to be considered the most important. The teachers mention that the balance between factual knowledge in the subject and the requirements that are prescribed in the curriculum, for example, reasoning and arguing, is good in the tests.

> I think it is good that we have national tests in the social sciences. I think it is needed because, maybe not so much for the pupils, but for the teachers' sake. National tests do have a 'wash-back' effect. It affects how we teach. Now I actually thought that the tests were quite good. It is very difficult, the balance between facts and abilities, but I think they succeeded quite well and then you send a powerful signal down into the school system among teachers. What is it that is important in the subject and what is it we are going to teach about? I think that in the long term we teachers will get better. (Teacher 7)

Some of the teachers also point out that the national tests have raised the status of the social sciences, not only when it comes to the number of lessons every week but also how it is valued among pupils and colleagues.

> Yes, I do definitely think there has been an increase in status. It has been obvious that it is not only these three, mathematics, Swedish and English, that are important. Now you are a bit more in the match, but I guess it is hard for us to win. (Teacher 3)

When only the subjects Swedish, mathematics and English had national tests, they were the most important subjects in school; then a national test was introduced

for the science subjects in 2010, and as mentioned earlier, in 2013 national tests were also introduced in the social sciences.

4.5.2.2 The Teachers' Views on How to Use the National Tests

As well as using the tests simply as a test to evaluate their teaching and the pupils' results every spring, the interviewed teachers also use the tests as a model for their teaching. The national tests provide ideas about how questions can be constructed, and some of the teachers use tasks from the national tests of 2013, which are public, in their teaching.

> Yes, there was a question [in the national tests in RE of 2013] that was about the ethical models and the death penalty. We looked at it. We used almost the same structure as in the test I think. (Teacher 2)
> You get some ideas when it comes to how to ask questions about ethics and how to assess these questions. (Teacher 6)

Even though the national tests take time from the regular teaching and the assessment of the tests is considered to claim a lot of the teachers' working hours, the teachers in the study are satisfied both with the fact that there are national tests in RE and with the quality of the tests. They consider that the tests provide valuable support when it comes to choosing relevant content and also to planning the teaching and their own tests.

4.5.3 Assessing Ethical Competence

In the syllabus for RE, there are a certain number of knowledge requirements specified, and one of them is about ethics. On the E-level, which constitutes a passing grade, the pupils are supposed to show that they can reason and argue by applying simple and to some extent informed reasoning about moral issues. To reach the highest grade, A, the pupils are supposed to argue by applying well-developed and well-informed reasoning. It is up to each teacher to interpret what simple reasoning and well-developed reasoning are. The teachers in the study consider this to be a problem for the equivalent assessment of ethics, and they perceive the national tests and the assessment instructions as a tool to get around this problem.

4.5.3.1 The Teachers' Views on the Tension Between Knowing What It Means to Act in a Good Way and Practising This

Ethics is, among other things, about conceptions about how to be a good human being, and the pupils are supposed to learn this in RE. As already mentioned, this knowledge can be said to be normative. Society rests upon values by which we

judge what is good or bad. Another responsibility of the Swedish school is to encourage the pupils to be creative, to challenge and to question things in their lives. These two duties, to be a good fellow human being based on specific values and to challenge society, could result in a conflict.

When asking the teachers about how they view these two dimensions of the schools' responsibility, none of them see a problem. They all interpret the national curriculum in the same way: it is not the pupils' opinions that are to be assessed, but their skills when it comes to reasoning and arguing. If a pupil has an opinion that is not consistent with the values of the Swedish school system and can argue for it in a developed and informed way, this is what will be assessed. But the teachers who give an example like this explain that they talk with their pupils, trying to make them understand that the opinion goes against the values of the Swedish school. They give as examples xenophobia and racism.

> I do not assess what they believe. If I see that they [the pupils] use a moral that does not work, that affects others, this is something I correct in a talk with the pupil. So I do not in any way assess their points of view, at least that's what I try to do, but it is their reasoning I assess. (Teacher 6)

The teachers also talk about the tension between knowing what it means to act in a way that is perceived as good and practising this during the day in school.

> You can do a 'four-corner-practice', and then during the break they [the pupils] go out and do just the opposite. If this is a way to show that you achieve the knowledge requirements in the curriculum, I do not know. In one way it is more important that they are good human beings, of course it is more important, but I cannot grade that. (Teacher 4)
>
> It is the same thing, whatever you work with, but especially when you work with questions about how we act towards each other. They [the pupils] are often very good when we discuss questions of value and so on. But then they go outside the classroom and actually… does the curriculum say that the pupils must show that they can live in a moral way? It only says that they are supposed to reason about it. (Teacher 2)

Even though the teachers are not supposed to assess the pupils' behaviour, since that has nothing to do with ethics or any other school subject, they care and have a responsibility to see to it that what is written about the schools' values in the curriculum is complied with.

4.5.3.2 The Influence of the Assessment Instructions on the Teachers' Understanding of Ethics

In the interviews, the teachers also mention how the assessment instructions that come with the national tests help them to improve their ability not only to assess the results of the tests but also to assess in a general way. None of the seven teachers in the study see any problem with assessing the pupils' ethical competence. As one of the teachers puts it, the Swedish National Agency for Education, which is responsible for the tests and all material in connection to it, has done a good job in concretising the knowledge requirements.

> Religious education is a complex subject, the world religions and ethics I think are very interesting, but life issues [livsfrågor] are hard to assess, if not impossible. But when it comes to ethics they [the Swedish National Agency for Education] have found a definition that works. (Teacher 7)
>
> Yes, I must say that I have changed my way of looking at it. Maybe I had expectations that were a bit too high compared to the assessment instructions, but in particular that it is not only about right or wrong answers, but more complex. That you are also supposed to problematise and concretise and so on. Now it is easier for me to see more of the abilities [specified in the curriculum], I would say. (Teacher 4)
>
> But on the other hand you can see the national tests and the assessment instructions as a support in interpreting the curriculum, and that's what I think. It is hard to imagine what they mean, especially in history, but now we are talking about religious education, but it is hard so you need support and help. (Teacher 1)

The assessment instructions can also be of help in the communication between the teacher and the pupils, for example, when the pupils want to know what to do to improve different skills and to get a higher grade.

> …we have got help now. Earlier you had a feeling that this answer is much better. Now you can say it to them [the pupils]. We have been able to show them that a more complex way of reasoning is about being able to do these things too. (Teacher 2)
>
> I think it is good, and above all that you can discuss it with the pupils. That they understand what… I can of course present the knowledge requirements from the curriculum, but it is always much easier when you have an example written by a pupil [from the assessment instructions]. For example, this is a complex connection, or…. (Teacher 4)
>
> The assessment instructions are actually a concretisation of the curriculum and then you can use them as this. I look at them very often when I try to make some kind of development schedule for the pupils. 'You need to argue in a better way.' 'Yes, but how?' Then you can see how the Swedish National Agency for Education thinks that a well-developed argument looks. You can use the explanations in the assessment instructions and explain to a pupil. So I believe they are useful, not only when assessing the national test. (Teacher 7)

Issues that are sometimes highlighted as problems when it comes to the assessment of ethics as a school subject, for example, normative content and a tension between predetermined values and the pupils' own critical thinking, are not seen as problematic by the seven teachers. They overcome these by assessing the pupils' ability to use the ethical models when arguing and reasoning about ethical dilemmas. They interpret ethics as a theoretical subject. The assessment instructions that come with the national tests are of help to the teachers when they assess both the national tests and also other work that the pupils do in RE. The assessment instructions concretise the knowledge requirements and are helpful when the teachers are explaining to the pupils what they are supposed to learn and how the pupils are supposed to show what they know.

4.5.4   The Teachers' Comments from a Lifeworld Theoretical Point of View

Two phenomenological concepts, *horizon* and *useful thing*, will be used in this part of the results. As in the other parts of the results, the choice of concepts has emerged from the interviews with the seven teachers.

The interviews have shown how the teachers regard the national tests and the assessment instructions in RE. According to the teachers, the test and the assessment instructions have changed their horizons when it comes to ethics. The teachers say that the tests give them new ideas with regard to both content to teach about and methods for how to teach. In that sense, the national tests in RE have opened up the horizons for the teachers. When they broaden their horizons and their teaching, it is also possible for the pupils to change their horizons when it comes to ethics. The tests provide the teachers with a new horizon of possibilities when it comes to teaching ethics. The teachers also say that they chose to act according to their new horizons.

According to the teachers' comments, it also seems as though their horizons have narrowed when it comes to the assessment of the pupils' work. The teachers consider that the assessment instructions are a help in understanding what ethics is about and what qualities they are to assess, but it seems as though the teachers mostly assess the pupils' ability to use ethical models. Even though the teachers say that they teach about ethical dilemmas, and this is what engages the pupils the most, this is not something they mention when they talk about what they assess.

In the process where the teachers' horizons move and they understand ethics in a new way, the tests and the assessment instructions also show themselves to be *useful things.* A useful thing becomes visible in a context the user understands. The tests and the assessment instructions are useful to teachers in RE. If, for example, a chemistry teacher were to look at the tests and instructions for RE, they would probably seem unclear and not show themselves as a useful thing. The teachers in RE are supposed to assess the pupils' skills in ethics, an area that is sometimes seen as fuzzy and contradictory; under these conditions the national tests and the assessments instructions can be understood as useful. The seven teachers in the study believe that the national tests and the assessment instructions function as a useful thing. The teachers say that they use the tests and the assessment instructions to change their teaching in a way that they consider to be an improvement. This material also functions as a useful thing for the teachers when they clarify and explain for their pupils what different qualities of ethical competence mean.

The concept horizon is helpful in seeing how the seven teachers regard the national tests, and the concept useful thing contributes to seeing how the teachers use the material.

4.6 Discussion

Since the new curriculum was introduced in 2011, the teachers in this study have changed their teaching in ethics. According to the teachers, it has become a more theoretical subject. Franck (2013) suggests that the curriculum from 2011 can be described as a change in perspective from a hermeneutic view to a more positivistic view of knowledge. But Franck (2013) also argues that it is important to interpret the policy documents in a way that gives pupils opportunities to develop an ability to argue in an ethical way and act morally. The seven teachers in this study, however, do not seem to have the same opinion as Franck. Their interpretation is that ethics is mostly theoretical and that their assessment of the pupils' skills is to be based on the pupils' ability to use ethical models. They express this at the same time as giving their personal views about what ethical competence is, a practical knowledge consisting of an ability to act in a good way and an ability to know why you choose to act as you do. The teachers in the study seem to value the pupils' ability to argue and reason based on different models more highly than when the pupils argue and reason based on their own opinions.

Both Thornberg and Oguz (2013) and Veugelers (2000) note in their studies that values education was seen by the teachers as something they had to do in addition to their ordinary practice. In this study, the teachers also say that how to behave in the classroom and to express values that are consistent with the values of the Swedish school are things that they work with together with their students but that they are not a part of ethics since they are not something that the teachers are going to assess.

Sometimes ethics is described as a normative subject (Osbeck et al. 2015); this is something that is highlighted during the interviews with the seven teachers. The teachers say that they are aware of this and since they have this awareness, there is no problem. They say that they get around this difficulty by being open to the pupils' own opinions in the discussions they have in class, and they also emphasise that not all people have the same values or points of view. But in other parts of the interviews, the teachers talk about wanting their pupils to learn how to act in the "right" and in "correct" way. So a question that arises from this is whether the teachers are aware of their own normativity. It is probably impossible not to be normative, but to admit it makes it easier for the pupils to see this dilemma in the subject. It is possible to describe these dilemmas, between a theoretical and hermeneutic view of knowledge and between ethics as a normative or a nonnormative subject, as being invisible to the teachers in the study. An explanation for this might be that ethics as a subject area gets relatively little attention during teacher education in RE (Thornberg and Oguz 2013).

It may be that the dilemma between a theoretical and a hermeneutic approach arises as result of the fact that since ethics is normative, it is hard to assess. It is easier to understand the subject as a theoretical subject, in the same way that it is easier to assess the pupils' skills in using different ethical models than to assess the pupils' own opinions. When the teacher has little experience of, for example, the

inbuilt dilemmas of ethics, the national tests and the assessment instructions are seen as something that clarifies both what to teach and also how to assess.

According to the study that Osbeck et al. (2015) report on, assessing ethics in the national tests is a difficult task. This is not something the seven teachers in this study mention. Instead they talk about the tests and the assessment instructions as being helpful. The difference between the teachers in these two studies is that in the former study, the teachers "think aloud" at the same time as they assess the pupils' answers in ethics. In the study described in this chapter, the teachers talk about teaching and assessing ethics approximately 6 months after the pupils took the tests. A probable conclusion to be drawn from these two studies is that assessing is hard but that the national tests and the assessment instructions facilitate the work. This conclusion is also confirmed by van der Schaaf et al. (2012), who found that teachers using assessment criteria improved their judgement.

Assessing the tasks that are about ethics in the national tests can be compared to what Sadler (2009) calls analytic grading, i.e. the teachers make a separate qualitative judgement on every task. The tests are however constructed in a way that aims to support a more holistic grading, as the pupils get the opportunity to show their abilities in every skill in more than one task in the tests. In earlier research (e.g. Osbeck et al. 2015), it is also shown that teachers read the underlying intentions of pupils' answers when they are hard to understand. They take into account earlier experiences of their pupils' abilities when they assess the tasks in the national tests. In that way the assessment becomes more holistic.

The teachers in the study appreciate the tests and the assessment instructions; they believe the material makes the subject clearer. They believe that the material works as a useful thing. So because the teachers interpret ethics as a more theoretical subject, they devote a greater proportion of their teaching time to it. Some of the teachers say that before the curriculum of 2011, they mostly taught about ethical dilemmas now and then, but since the new curriculum was introduced, they must assess the pupils' ability to use ethical models and as a consequence spend more time on the subject. The Swedish and Turkish teachers in Thornberg and Oguz's (2013) study did not use a scientific metalanguage when they talked about values education. Whether the teachers in this study do that to a greater extent is impossible to say, but they talk about having a greater sense of security when they describe and assess different qualities in the pupils' answers. One teacher explains that earlier she "felt" the quality of an answer, but with the assessment instructions, she has got the words to express it. Because of this it is also easier for the pupils to know how to improve their skills. In this way both the teachers and the pupils get opportunities to widen their horizons and also to strive for the same goal.

The teachers in this study say that they are satisfied with the fact that RE has a national test since it makes their work easier in some ways and since it gives a higher status to the subject. According to Thornberg and Oguz's (2013) discussion, a theoretical and academic language is of importance for how the teaching profession is regarded. The national tests and the assessment instructions can also, according to this discussion, be seen as a useful thing when it comes to improving the status of teachers' work.

The teachers consider that their teaching and their ability to assess have improved due to the national tests and the assessment instructions, but the question is what the pupils have the opportunity to learn: is it a general ethical competence or is it simply the skill to use ethical models?

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Chapter 5
Ethical Competences in Pupils' Texts: Existential Understandings and Ethical Insights as Central but Tacit in the Curriculum

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Abstract The *aim* of the chapter is to present and discuss conceptions of ethical competence in relation to a sample of pupils' writings about forgiveness in a Swedish national test in religious education (RE). What kinds of ethical competences are shown? The chapter draws on previous research showing ethical insight as a potentially central ethical sub-competence present in pupils' responses but simultaneously absent and tacit in curriculum and assessment instructions.

Fifty responses of pupils aged 15–16 years to a task about forgiveness are analysed and interpreted with qualitative *methods*, and Martha Nussbaum's virtue and capability approaches to ethics are used in order to develop the interpretations of the responses, especially concerning ethical insights.

The *findings* show that the task, in line with the syllabus and the assessment instructions, asks mainly for argumentative and analytical competences. A normative competence is to some extent required, even if it is not an object of assessment. The analyses of the pupils' responses show that an argumentative competence, which presupposes an analytical one, is often intertwined with a normative competence. Arguments in favour of asking for forgiveness and for forgiving are also defences of values of a more or less egocentric/altruistic nature, which in moral development contexts are often understood as being of importance. In line with a previous study, about teacher's thoughts while assessing this task on the national test, a competence relating to ethical insights and existential understandings is shown. It manifests itself as central for the ability to argue for the importance of forgiveness, but especially to problematise that. The pupils' responses also reveal as central a conceptual competence that clarifies the nature of a relation, situation or an action that is an object of an ethical analysis. In order to clarify the nature of forgiveness, concepts such as conscience, remorse and redressing are shown to be helpful.

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One contribution made by this chapter is the visualisation of existential understandings and ethical insights as forms of ethical competences, and the descriptions of what these competences can mean in ethical work. Ethical insights and existential understandings can be described as being central forms of ethical competences in the pupils' responses, although they are not made explicit in the syllabus.

In order to develop pedagogical practice in ethics in Swedish schools – and perhaps also beyond – a *conclusion* of the study is the importance of turning ethical insights and existential understandings from tacit and implicit ethical sub-competences into manifest and explicit competences and thereby into objects of teaching and learning in ethics education.

5.1   Introduction

A previous study aiming at identifying challenges that teachers can experience when assessing pupils' knowledge in ethics in national tests in religious education, showed that one of the challenges identified was related to teachers having partly competing ideas about what pupils should be given credit for during assessment in ethics (Osbeck et al. 2015). These ideas were additional to or alternatives to those in the assessment instructions regarding competences in the knowledge field of ethics. They concerned the use of certain precise concepts, the expression of altruistic values and demonstrations of ethical insights.

The first two of these aspects of pupils' responses that are regarded as important by the teachers seem to be easier to grasp than the third. Language is often referred to as the tool of tools in sociocultural traditions of learning (e.g. Säljö 2005, p. 81) through which one is able to notice, think, express and act in a more nuanced and rich way (e.g. Osbeck 2009), which also applies when it comes to ethics (Tappan 2006). The link between an altruistic perspective and ethical competence is a feature underlying much of the western ethical tradition including, for instance, the Kohlbergian moral development tradition (Bergling 1987; Kohlberg 1971; Piaget 1972). Therefore the presence of such a perspective is not that surprising. But what is the meaning of the third aspect, the expression of ethical insights in pupils' texts? And in what way can such an expression be regarded as a merit?

Ethical insight is not a phrase used by the teachers in the study referred to above (Osbeck et al. 2015), who "thought aloud" as they assessed pupils' texts. It is used by the researchers as a characterising term for recurring qualities in pupils' answers that are highlighted by the teachers. For instance, one pupil's response, stressing that asking another person for forgiveness is related to a simultaneous process of forgiving yourself, is pointed out by a teacher as being qualitatively outstanding, by saying that it is a good answer with depth. Another pupil's answer mentioned by a teacher expresses, for example, how asking for forgiveness means swallowing one's pride and showing humbleness towards the person who has the power to forgive you. Without going into detail about the examples at this point, it may be said that

it is shown that the assessing "thinking-aloud" teachers notice that some answers express certain insights into the existential situation, here forgiveness, which the teacher wants to emphasise as qualitatively relevant in ethics. That is what is called ethical insight in the study (cf. existential understanding, p. 100, this article). In this chapter, these findings will be examined further.

The aim of the chapter is to present and discuss conceptions of ethical competence in relation to a sample of pupils' writings about forgiveness in a national test in RE. What kinds of ethical competences are shown here? It is of special interest to examine the suggestion found in previous research concerning ethical insights as a potentially central ethical sub-competence that is present in pupils' responses but as an sub-competence that is absent in curriculum and assessment instructions. If ethical insight can be identified as an ethical competence in the pupils' responses, how does it manifest itself and what does it mean? In order to develop and qualify the empirical findings of the study concerning ideas about ethical insights, the findings are related to Martha Nussbaum's virtue and capability approaches to ethics. Since the texts that are analysed are pupils' answers to a specific task and therefore must be interpreted in the light of this, the task itself, its assessment instructions and their foundation in the curriculum are described here in terms of varieties of ethical competences, which are formulated in relation to previous empirical research and Nussbaum's theories.

5.2 Ethics Education, Ethical Competences, and Central Features in Previous Research

Ethics education, i.e. teaching and learning ethics and ethical competence, is a knowledge field that relates to both a subject matter educational field, in Sweden primarily religious education, and to values education as a knowledge field. Values education in itself includes a broad spectrum of practices such as moral education, character education, civic education and citizenship education (Taylor 1994; Thornberg 2006). What characterises ethics education, as it is understood here, is that it is formal rather than informal, and explicit rather than implicit, conceptual distinctions stressed by, for example, Thornberg.

An important question for ethics education and research in this field is of course what kind of ethics, or what kind of ethical competence, education aims for with regard to its pupils' development. The question is hard to examine since the curriculum operates on different levels: at an institutional policy level, an instructional teaching level and an experiential pupil level (e.g. Goodlad and Su 1992; Bråten 2009). While ethical competence as it is stressed in policy is a temporally fixed phenomenon, ethical competence in teaching and learning is continuously under construction. This general difficulty has been stated in the research debate to be even more troublesome in ethics or moral education since what it means to be "good at" morality is so disputed and therefore it is also unclear what a desirable progres-

sion in the area means (Wilson 2000). The findings in the study of the assessing teachers referred to in the introduction of this chapter support such a conclusion (Osbeck et al. 2015). Ethics as a knowledge field in school appears, in light of the teachers' statements, as quite vague: very little can be taken for granted with regard to what pupils are expected to learn.

In research concerning values education, it has been common to differentiate between values education of a traditional, a progressive and a critical character (Thornberg 2006). An elaborated form of this distinction is the division between conservative, liberal, critical and postmodern approaches used by Tiffany Mary Jones (2009) in order to analyse different approaches in the national framework for values education in Australia. One thing to point out with the two latter categories is that the division between critical and postmodern values education draws attention firstly to differences concerning how far the deconstruction of established values goes – where the postmodern approach is the more radical one of the two – and secondly to the degree to which there is an interest in reconstructing, at least temporarily, agreed value bases – where critical approaches are more eager to do this than postmodern ones. Jones found that conservative approaches, aiming at transmitting dominant and prescribed values, were strongly privileged in the national framework, a result that is in accordance with descriptions of Swedish teachers' aims with their values education, which have been characterised as traditional (Thornberg and Oğuz 2013). One objection to describing these findings as similar may be that there can be quite large differences between them concerning what values are characterised as traditional. The Swedish curriculum stresses values that in some contexts could be understood as progressive in themselves, which means that an approach that supports these perspectives can be understood as both progressive and traditional simultaneously. At any rate, the values mentioned in the study by Thornberg and Oğuz were not especially progressive since they were about conformity to rules, honesty, respectfulness and being self-disciplined, kind and nice.

Interpreting these findings in terms of ethical competences, one could say that it seems to be an aim of traditional education to develop an ethical competence that performs and imparts the dominant values of society. This could be described as a non-analytical (at least not in an explicit sense) normative and content-specific competence. Postmodern education seems to aim at developing a competence to critically deconstruct dominant values. The competence can therefore be described as an analytical, non-normative (at least not in an explicitly prescriptive sense) ethical competence. Critical education could be described as aiming at developing a competence in order to critically examine dominant values but also in order to take standpoints and argue for positions and values. This ethical competence can be understood as analytical and normative but not content-specific. One may also, in the characterisation of which ethical competences can be said to be required in these different approaches within values education, want to add a verbal, argumentative competence.

Ethical competences that include analytical, verbal and normative sub-competences can be said to have been taken for granted in ethical traditions of both a deontological and a teleological nature. The stumbling block has instead been

establishing what can be considered to be valid criteria for deciding what reasonable positions may be. Even if one tradition has pleaded for principles and rules and the other for consequences, both have received similar criticism for being too artificial, too general and too universalistic in their focuses. This means that they do not pay enough attention to the specific situation, its circumstances, conditions and the relations involved. The criticism of the Piaget-inspired Kohlbergian moral development tradition (e.g. Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; Tappan 1992; Vestøl 2005) has received much attention in the educational field. Important contributions to this criticism of non-contextual, universal and action-oriented ethics has also been found in the Aristotelian virtue tradition (e.g. Nussbaum 1995), and in the tradition sometimes called the ethics of closeness, with Emanuel Lévinas (e.g. 1987) and Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1997) as central figures.

All the above perspectives would be sceptical towards an attempt to capture ethical competence in analytical, verbal and normative sub-competences. An essential competence that must be added is sensitivity to the demands of a specific situation. Such a sensitivity is marked by perceptiveness with regard to the views and experiences of the interacting persons, the context, its demands and experienced chances to do good. Therefore not only perceptiveness but also empathy, experiences, (existential) understandings, imagination and to a certain degree visions of a good common life are presupposed to be important, in order to grasp and respond to the demands of a situation. This kind of ethical competence – a composed and complex competence – can here be tentatively called ethical insight.

5.3 Nussbaum's Neo-Aristotelian Perspective

The ethical perspectives described above (ethics of care, the Aristotelian virtue tradition and ethics of closeness), can all be said to stress ethical insights as ethical competences that are important in order to fully grasp the complexity of a single situation and determine what it is best to do in this situation. Despite their similarities, they also have points where they differ. In order to be more concrete, without having to deal with these differences, Martha Nussbaum's theories have been chosen to give a theoretical basis for the discussion of ethical insights and thereby enable a richer understanding of ethical insights as ethical competences (Nussbaum 1995).

In the centre of Nussbaum's ethical theories is the individual and unique human being. She is placed in the messy practice of everyday life, where she lives together with her fellow beings in an existence full of surprises, which it is never possible to fully control. To identify the best actions and solutions in advance is therefore seldom possible. Situations are ongoing processes and conditions shift. Ethical insights are of great importance, and through these she is able to interpret a situation and act in a responsible way in relation to previous experiences and her imagination (fantasia). Her everyday context is also the milieu that she depends on for her moral development and ethical insights. A virtue is an acquired character trait. Even if one

cannot choose one's birth/family situation, one can, to varying degrees, choose other alternative and complementary contexts where one lives one's life but also becomes aware of one's simultaneous belonging to the wider community of human beings (1995, p. 34).

Nussbaum's understanding that situations are unique and that one should never let one's ethical insight be dominated by rules or principles, doesn't mean that one cannot be helped by ideals, which one perhaps also regards as universal, nor does it mean that critical analyses are problematic for one's ethical insight. From Nussbaum's Aristotelian perspective, it is eudemonia that should be given priority and, in that sense, it works as a critical corrective. Eudemonia is a full, good human life that consists of many different aspects, where the whole and the incommensurability of its many-sidedness are valued. Friendliness, braveness, generosity and justness are values and virtues that are all worth aiming at as a general rule. (See also the capabilities that Nussbaum argues in favour of, and which, she maintains, the state should guarantee each member opportunities to develop a minimum level of, e.g. 2001, p. 41ff.). One value or virtue cannot be substituted for another. Each one of them can however be critically examined by asking if one's life would be less valuable and complete without the value in question. Emotions and insights should also be analysed. Emotions give information about what one holds to be true, information that is important in the ongoing reflexive cultivation of one's humanity. Both emotions and beliefs can be changed by living a virtuous everyday life. In order to stress the importance of an analytical and reflexive process – partly in opposition to another neo-Aristotelian, Alasdair MacIntyre, who according to Nussbaum highlights the centrality of habits (1995, p. 31) – Nussbaum places Aristotle in the Socratic tradition, which says that an unexamined life is not worth living. No virtue is worthy of its name if it cannot defend itself in the court of reason (p. 33).

Emotions and ethical insights are, as has been shown, of central value for a moral life and ethical actions. They can be understood as forms of ethical competence or sub-competences. Life experiences are important in order to develop such ethical insights but indirect experiences gained through stories also shape understanding, feelings and empathy, which are of importance (1995, p. 73). These insights help one to recognise important patterns in complex situations. They help in identifying what is relevant since they also rather immediately and spontaneously connect perceptions and observations with beliefs and truth claims about, for example, what a good, worthy and prosperous human life is. Emotions and ethical insights are in a continuous interaction with analytical processes. Attention should be paid to emotions, as they demonstrate one's beliefs and are, for virtuous people, also products of reflexive, aware and target-oriented processes. They are never "merely emotions" without cognitive elements. Neither is fantasia a skill that doesn't involve cognition. In relation to Aristotle's term fantasia, Nussbaum uses the additional and clarifying label "deliberative fantasia" (p. 79). Fantasia can affect ethical insight and ethical competence in a positive way, since it carries with it the possibility of taking into account what is not present, making this present and, through these combinations, creating insights that are not related to experience.

5.4   Ethical Competences in the Curriculum and National Tests in RE

Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelian perspective gives a wider understanding of what ethical insights as forms of ethical competence can mean. However, the focus is now once more the perspectives of the assessing "thinking-aloud" teachers referred to above, and more specifically the question of whether ethical insight is a competence that the national test in RE does not reflect. If it doesn't, is this a consequence of the general curriculum,[1] the syllabus for RE or the test in itself? In order to achieve a comprehensible discussion, distinctions will be made between required competences of analytical, normative, verbal (argumentative and conceptual) and insightful kinds.

5.4.1   Curriculum

In the general curriculum, the explicitly required ethical competences are mostly of a normative character. Both predetermined, content-specific competences and personal, non-content-specific competences can be found. The school should, among other things, "represent and impart" (Swedish National Agency for Education 2011, p. 9) the stated fundamental values to pupils (see Franck 2017, p. 13), "in order to prepare them to live and work in society" (p. 11). But education should also "support pupils in developing their ability to form personal standpoints" (p. 12). Which other kinds of competences can be regarded as essential in order to develop such a normative competence – the ability to form a personal standpoint – are not stated, however. It is possible that all ethical sub-competences focused on in this chapter are actually required.

5.4.2   Syllabus for Religious Education

The RE syllabus is, as are the syllabuses for other subjects, divided into three sections labelled *aim*, *core content* and *knowledge requirements*. In the *aim section* the central abilities that the teaching aims to develop are stated. Here one finds demands for ethical competences of both a normative and an analytical nature but perhaps also an additional one: an action competence. Action competence, however, can also be interpreted as a part of normative competence. The required normative competences are not, here in the syllabus, of a predetermined, content-specific

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[1] Note that the Swedish curriculum [*läroplan*] is made up of an introductory section (here called the general curriculum), which is not specific to any subject, and also a section containing the syllabuses [*kursplaner*] for the individual subjects.

character relating to fundamental values but merely of a non-content-specific and personal character. The explicit requirements for pupils to reflect, which are also stated in the aim section, have here been interpreted as part of an analytical competence. These requirements are expressed as follows: "Teaching should encourage pupils to reflect over various issues concerning life, their identity and their ethical attitudes." (p. 176). "Pupils should, in addition, be equipped to analyse and determine their standpoint in ethical and moral questions. Teaching should also contribute to pupils developing an understanding of how people's values are linked to religions and other outlooks on life. It should also contribute to pupils developing their capacity to act responsibly in relation to themselves and their surroundings." (p. 176). The last sentence reflects the normative action competence, an ability to act responsibly – a way of acting that not is defined further. It might also be thought that the necessity for an analytical competence is implied, since such a competence is often a prerequisite in order to be able to identify different options for how to act. In the aim section, which stresses the central abilities that RE should develop, an argumentative competence is, however, explicitly described. It is clearer in Swedish than in English. "Teaching in religion should essentially give pupils the opportunities to develop their ability to: […] reason and discuss [*argumentera*] moral issues and values based on ethical concepts and models […]." (p. 176).

The *core content* to some extent reflects the required ethical competences. Concepts such as analysis and argumentation are explicitly referred to. Normative perspectives, and also requirements for non-content-specific, personal standpoints, are absent. In some sense competences like ethical insights are hinted at, since content such as "daily moral dilemmas", "views of the good life" and "virtue ethics" are stressed (p. 180).

The *knowledge requirement* concerning ethics, if given without "progression expressions" ("progressionsuttryck": expressions showing a progression through the grades from E to A), reads as follows: "Pupils can reason and argue about moral issues and values by applying […] informed reasoning, and use ethical concepts and models in a […] functional way." (p. 184). Here both an analytical and a verbal competence, mainly argumentative but also conceptual, are required but one can also wonder about what kind of competences are demanded in order to be able to apply informed reasoning. Some kind of understanding of the situation in question can be interpreted as being necessary, perhaps an existential understanding, if the content is daily moral dilemmas, something that, in line with the theoretical perspective presented above, can be described as connected to the concept of ethical insight.

In sum, the curriculum analyses have shown that the ethical competences explicitly and primarily required are of an analytical and verbal – argumentative – kind. Ethical insights are not stated to be something that the curriculum requires pupils to develop, which supports the assessing teachers' perspectives that these competences are, to a large extent, absent from the requirements. To some extent this can be considered to be a question of interpretation since, as shown above, hints of such competences do exist.

5.4.3   The National RE Test

If insightfulness as an ethical competence is almost absent in the curriculum, it seems likely that it will not be required in the national test in RE. However, the question will here be examined by using one example, one of three ethical tasks in the grade 9 test.

The *task* about forgiveness from the national test of 2013, which is in question here, is both the one for which 50 pupils' responses have been analysed (the findings of this analysis will be presented below) and the one for which the "thinking-aloud" teachers assessed the pupils' responses.

> The word forgiveness is an important ethical concept. You may yourself have forgiven someone or experienced being forgiven. Reason about [*Resonera om*][2] why forgiveness can be important both for the person asking for forgiveness and the person who forgives? (Skolverket 2013, p. 8) [author's translation]

The task can be interpreted as primarily asking pupils to present arguments for fixed positions, meaning that analytical and argumentative competences are required. What makes such an interpretation not entirely convincing are two points regarding how the question is formulated. The information that the word forgiveness is an important ethical concept as well as the references to the experiences of the pupil seem to be redundant, if the aim is to solve the task in line with such an interpretation. And why is the appeal "Reason about why…" not formulated as 'argue for why' or 'give reasons for why'? It is obvious that a broader request is intended but what does it mean? What kind of competence is required in order to "*reason about* why…" (author's italics)? Nor is it certain, moreover, that the task is about arguing in favour of a *given* standpoint since the formulation is a relative one, "why forgiveness *can be* important" (author's italics). So what is this formulation asking the pupils to do? Should one also discuss why forgiveness is not necessarily of importance? And what ethical competences would then be required to do this?

The section in the assessment instructions called *Starting points for assessment* does not give more information about why "reason about" is used, or why this broad form of the task has been chosen. On the contrary, the wording of the assessment instructions limit the form of the task by asking assessing teachers to focus on the pupil's "answer to the question why". However, the idea that the formulation "can be" may be an appeal to discuss why forgiveness is not necessarily important, could be seen to be supported in this section of the assessment instructions, as the instructions urge the assessing teacher to focus on the extent to which the two aspects of forgiveness (to forgive and to ask for forgiveness) are problematised (Skolverket 2013b, p. 12).

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[2] Note that in the English translation of the national test, *resonera om* is translated as "discuss". However, I translate it here as "reason about" in order to emphasise that, for Swedish-speaking pupils, what they are being asked to do is to "argue/reason around" the topic of why forgiveness is important, rather than simply being asked to explain why forgiveness is important.

The *progression table* given in the assessment instructions, which shows the requirements for the different grades, gives no further information about the type of problematising – demanded for the highest level (A) – that is of interest. The developed form of reasoning that is required for the middle and highest grades is described as expressing the importance of forgiveness, for instance by commenting on its meaning and consequences. This supports the more limited interpretation of the two possibilities shown above concerning what "reasoning about why" may mean. The description points directly towards the importance of forgiveness. This interpretation is, however, complicated by the fact that there is, in the progression table, also a general requirement for all grades to "reason about" not the phenomenon of forgiveness but the concept of forgiveness, including its two aspects (forgiving and asking for forgiveness). This seems to be an additional requirement, which is not expressed in the instructions given in the task, where pupils are not asked to "reason about" forgiveness as a concept. This introduces a third interpretation of the reasoning task besides the broader and the limited one previously described.

The assessment instructions also include a general *comment* to the assessing teachers. In this section of the assessment instructions, the ability to discuss the concept of forgiveness (the third interpretation of the reasoning task, from the progression table) is not mentioned. However, attention is paid to forgiveness as a concept, although in another sense. The comment says that the task is testing the pupil's ability to reason about moral issues and values by *using* ethical concepts. This statement, which is similar to the formulation in the knowledge requirement in the syllabus, is surprising since the task is not formulated as an appeal to use forgiveness as an analytical concept, a concept to use in order to analyse (another – which?) moral issue. Moreover, it may be noticed that it is the more limited interpretation of the reasoning task that is supported here in the comment section, as it is the importance of forgiveness as such that is placed in the foreground.

Finally the assessment instructions also include *examples of pupils' responses* with *comments*, which help to clarify which interpretations of the instructions are valid. For instance it is clear that the pupils do not have to work from the specific normative standpoint concerning forgiveness – that it is important – that the task might be seen as implying. A response in which it is argued that it is difficult, rather than important, to forgive is considered valid (the E-grade example). Further, it seems acceptable to use a rather broad "reasoning about" the phenomenon forgiveness, even if this means that the argument for why forgiveness is important is quite implicit (the C-grade example). Simultaneously, it can be interpreted as being of importance that the pupils' responses about the phenomenon forgiveness are written in a way that can be interpreted as arguments for why forgiveness can be considered important. A response with a more general description of aspects related to forgiveness has received the failing grade F. Finally, the example of an A-grade answer shows that the kind of problematising that is relevant to the assessment is one where the pupil argues in a way that shows awareness of other perspectives and arguments. However, one of the examples of a problematising statement seems to be only rather loosely connected to the importance of forgiveness and shows more of a general existential understanding, saying that how a human being feels is not something that

can always be seen from the outside. Most surprising is, perhaps, that what can be interpreted as an additional answer quality is highlighted here. It is a verbal, conceptual competence. It is pointed out that the author of the A-grade answer uses words like conscience and guilt. Such a quality is, however, not mentioned anywhere else in the assessment instructions and it is therefore not clear if it should be regarded as a merit required for an A-grade in this task or not.

In sum one can say that the national test and its assessment instructions, like the curriculum, primarily stress analytical and argumentative ethical competences. A normative competence is not really required since the pupils do not have to take a standpoint themselves but could instead, through an analysis of forgiveness, point out arguments that could be considered important in relation to the person who asks for forgiveness and ones that could be considered important in relation to the person who is asked for forgiveness.

So is it then true that insights as forms of ethical competence are absent among the required abilities and competences highlighted in the national test and its assessment instructions? It clearly depends on what one means by ethical insights. The examples of pupils' responses that the assessing "thinking-aloud" teachers give, which are referred to in the introduction of this chapter (Osbeck et al. 2015), are similar to the examples of pupils' responses that the assessment instructions describe as problematisations. The example given in the assessment instructions of an A-grade answer shows an existential understanding that it can be hard to forgive straight away and makes it into an ethical insight, something that it is relevant to take into account when discussing why it is important to forgive. This existential understanding/ethical insight works here as a problematisation in relation to the point of view of the task – the importance of forgiveness – and is therefore seen as a statement that the pupil should be given credit for. If an existential understanding and ethical insight had worked in the same direction as the point of view of the task and fully supported the importance of forgiveness, one might wonder whether the answer, despite this, would have been presented as an example of an A-grade answer. It seems unlikely that it would, from the instructions, since the ethical insight in that case would not constitute a problematisation.

5.5 Material and Method

The 50 pupils' responses analysed are genuine answers from one of the ethical tasks in the 2013 national test in religious education, the first national test in RE commissioned by the Swedish government via the National Agency for Education and constructed by the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg. Although the author of this chapter today works at this university department, this was not the case when the test of 2013 was developed. All in all about 20,000 pupils, one quarter of all pupils in school year nine, pupils who are between 15 and 16 years old, took the test in 2013. Pupils in school year six also took a national test in RE but these tests and responses are not focused on in the

study presented here. Copies of all grade-9 tests that were written by pupils born on the sixth of each month were sent to the department at the University of Gothenburg to be analysed, as part of the process of developing and improving the tests. Slightly more than 500 tests were received by the department, a sample that can be considered to be representative of the whole group of pupils that took the test in 2013. In a research project funded by the Swedish Research Council "What May be Learnt in Ethics? – Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School" (2015–2017), parts of this material are being analysed and permission for this has been given by both the National Agency for Education and from the regional ethical review board located in Gothenburg.

This study is a part of the research project "What May be Learnt in Ethics?" and is based on a sample of the sample of tests written by the pupils born on the sixth of each month, i.e. 50 pupils' responses. One task, the forgiveness task, has been in focus. The sample of 50 pupils is not a representative one but rather a special procedure has been used in order to try to guarantee a variation in perspectives. The likelihood of the sample displaying varied ethical perspectives has been assumed to increase if there is a variety in the sample with regard to the pupils' municipalities, gender and test grades, as well as schools, where the variation concerning the level of students with immigrant backgrounds and parents with a post upper secondary education has been of interest. In practice it has been hard to create an even distribution of all these factors simultaneously. The current distribution is shown in the Table 5.1 and the sample is considered to meet the demand of the study, i.e. to show variance concerning the factors in question.

The material was examined using a qualitative content analysis, with the overarching purpose of identifying varieties of ethical competences in the responses of the pupils. The categories of sub-competences developed from previous research and the theoretical foundation of the study were used (analytical, normative, verbal – argumentative as well as conceptual – and insightful). The first analyses were, however, inductive and focused on the ways that the pupils solved the task. In these processes the qualitative data analysis program Nvivo was used. Categories were generated through labelling of ways that the pupils solved their tasks. Two main analytical focuses were found to be relevant on the basis of both the material and the purpose of the study. Firstly, attention was directed towards how pupils argue for the importance of both aspects of forgiveness (forgiving and asking for forgiveness) and secondly towards their explicit understanding of the existential phenomenon of forgiveness in general. It was also noted whether they used a special argumentative technique that could be identified and labelled. The categories of arguments were thereafter further categorised according to what values the arguments could be understood to be defending. This choice was made in order to reduce the amount of data, to identify overarching patterns that made sense of the data, and in order to show the normative expressions and competences that were discovered in the responses despite the fact that normative dimensions were of no interest according to the assessment instructions. Also new analyses of the categories of understandings of the existential phenomenon forgiveness were conducted. Here the aim was to show more explicitly the connections between the identified ethical insights and

Table 5.1 Affiliations of the 50 pupils, the authors of the texts in the sample, concerning factors of interest in maximising a variety of perspectives

Type of municipality						
Large cities	5					
Suburban municipalities of large cities	8					
Medium-sized cities	10					
Suburban municipalities of medium-sized cities	3					
Commuter municipalities	3					
Tourism and hospitality industry municipalities	4					
Manufacturing municipalities	5					
Sparsely populated municipalities, populated region	2					
Municipalities in densely populated region	7					
Municipalities in sparsely populated region	3					
Gender	Boys	Girls				
	23	27				
National RE test grades	A	B	C	D	E	F
	3	6	11	6	14	10
Number of schools with different proportions of parents with post upper secondary education	Low: ≤45 %		Middle: 45 %–65 %		High: >65 %	
	11		26		13	
Number of schools with different proportions of pupils with immigration background	Low: ≤10 %		Middle: 10 %–30 %		High: >30 %	
	21		41		8	

identified arguments for the importance of forgiveness, on the one hand, and the connections between identified ethical insights and the occurrence of problematisations of forgiveness, on the other hand. The patterns of the findings, in terms of categories, are illustrated below with quotations from the pupils' responses, in order to offer a clearer understanding of the categories and to show the presence of the perspectives in the material as well as showing the plausibility of the interpretations made. The varieties of ethical competences in the pupils' responses are revealed on the basis of these empirical categories.

5.6   Ethical Competences in 50 Pupils' Responses

The analytical and argumentative competences that the forgiveness task asks for are to a large extent also shown in the 50 responses that have been analysed. In 38 of the answers arguments are given for why forgiveness can be important both for the person asking for forgiveness and for the person who forgives. There are more arguments, all in all, for why it is import to ask for forgiveness than to forgive. This discrepancy is also to some extent shown by the fact that there are arguments for the

importance of asking for forgiveness in 45 of the answers and for the importance of forgiving in 42 of the pupils' texts.

Besides arguing for the importance of forgiveness for both parties, there is another principle way of responding to the task and that is to clarify the meaning of forgiveness and thereby, as it is interpreted in this chapter, show existential understanding and ethical insight. (These two expressions can be understood as being quite similar although not identical. Ethical insight draws largely upon existential understandings especially when the ethical case concerns an existential phenomenon such as forgiveness (Løgstrup 1997), which is why both expressions are used here). This is done in relation to either the general phenomenon of forgiveness or the two specific aspects of the phenomenon, i.e. forgiving and asking for forgiveness. These kinds of responses can be linked to what the progression table in the assessment instructions describes as the meaning and consequences of forgiveness, which in the progression table marks a way through which a line of reasoning is shown to be developed and well informed. This means, however, that the assessment instructions regard the ability to deal with meaning and consequences as a primarily argumentative competence, something that characterises well-developed reasoning, instead of understanding it as an expression of ethical insight, a competence that cannot simply be reduced either to an analytical or an argumentative competence. However it is perhaps possible to interpret the statement in the syllabus saying that the pupils' reasoning should be not only "well developed" but also "well *informed*", as a statement that points towards a visualisation of existential understanding and ethical insight as competences. To clarify the meaning of forgiveness, here understood as showing existential understanding and ethical insight, is also done through problematisations of forgiveness. The assessment instructions also regard this as an indication of developed reasoning. Empirical examples of the two main ways of responding to the task will be given below, as well as characteristic features of them.

5.6.1 Values Defended in Arguments: Argumentative and Normative Competences Intertwined

The arguments that are given for the importance of asking for forgiveness and forgiving differ with regard to, among others things, what they work in defence of, which to a greater or lesser degree relates to egocentric-altruistic values. Some arguments defend the individual, others his/her fellow being, the friendship, a continuation of human interaction or an ethical order.

It is the well-being of the *individual* that is defended when it is stated that it is important to ask for forgiveness in order to avoid punishment from God. "In order to go to heaven, and not be punished. Because you want to be loved by God." (Pupil 3). In a similar way the individual is protected in arguments for the importance of asking for forgiveness, since it increases the chances of being asked for forgiveness in return. "Another time it could be the other way around, that the person who is

now asking for forgiveness is going to be the one who is supposed to forgive." (Pupil 29). This is also the case in the argument that describes asking for forgiveness as a relief and a chance to let things go. "The person who hurts someone can feel extremely bad and to take away this worry, it is best to ask for forgiveness." (Pupil 14). This last kind of argument is also used when arguing for why it is important to forgive. Here also the well-being of the individual is in focus. "It's also good for the person who forgives so he can really forget what happened and is not driven by hatred." (Pupil 50). As mentioned above, religiously motivated arguments focusing on the well-being of the individual exist. "For the one who forgives another individual gets more xxx [unreadable] praise from God." (Pupil 16). An argument that occurs a bit more frequently, which also safeguards the interests of the individual who forgives, is that the act of forgiving increases the likelihood of being forgiven yourself on another occasion. "If you want to be forgiven yourself you should forgive others." (Pupil 20).

The defence of the other party, the *fellow being* of the individual, is also shown in the arguments for the importance of both forgiving and asking for forgiveness. Starting with the latter, the arguments stress that asking for forgiveness can mean a lot to the person who is being asked. In order to take care of one's fellow being, one should ask for forgiveness. "It could mean a lot for the person who forgives if the other asks for forgiveness. Because the person who forgives may have been very hurt by that person. Sometimes perhaps you think it is just something small so you do not need to ask for forgiveness but the other might not think so at all. So one should always say sorry." (Pupil 44). The arguments for forgiving as a way of giving a second chance are also centred on the interests of the fellow being. "Then everybody deserves a second chance." (Pupil 40).

As shown above, the same type of arguments can often be found for both the importance of forgiving and the importance of asking for forgiveness, with necessary differences of course. This is also the case when it is the *friendship* itself that is defended in the arguments. "If you get an apology from someone. It feels good inside. It feels like the person who apologises wants to keep you in their life." (Pupil 23). "If one never forgives one loses in the end one's whole environment. A big part of being a good friend is to be able to forgive, to understand and accept the shortcomings that everyone has." (Pupil 48). Similar to the arguments for friendship are the arguments for both aspects of forgiveness as ways of growing together. "Forgiving is also a sign of maturity. One lowers one's guard. It can also be a relief to forgive. You can let go of the past and think about the future. I also think that the person who asks for forgiveness grows in the eyes of other person. One takes the initiative, shows remorse, actually shows oneself as weak. One grows as a person when one asks for forgiveness and when one forgives." (Pupil 1). Individual growth is intertwined with the relational growth that is defended.

Arguments for forgiveness as a relief and a chance to let go are sometimes stressed in a sense that can be understood as a defence of the well-being of the individual as described above. They can also however, as in the following examples, be emphasised as a defence of people's opportunities in life in a broader sense, a

possible *continuation of human interaction* and a creative everyday life. "To always walk around and brood and be miserable about a mistake you made that might hurt someone else. It takes your energy and time is wasted on all the worry that is growing inside you." (Pupil 19). "Forgiveness is important in order to be able to continue your daily life." (Pupil 40).

The remaining object of defence that can be found in the arguments for forgiving and asking for forgiveness is an *ethical order* as such. This appears in the pupils' answers as arguments about asking for forgiveness as a way to show what is right and wrong. "But the main thing with forgiveness is that you must realise the mistake or error that has been made" (Pupil 4). These answers do not only argue for the importance of forgiveness because it shows what is right and wrong but also because the process of forgiveness creates values and order. "If everyone in the world forgave each other and thought of other things than violence and revenge the world would be much better. There would be fewer wars and conflicts. So many people would benefit if people began to forgive one another!" (Pupil 18). "Forgiving someone is also good because it proves to others, but most for the one who forgives, that you are tolerant and wise." (Pupil 17). A world view is as such partly an ethical order. Therefore arguments for the importance of forgiving that are based on obligations in relation to a world view can also be understood as basically defending the ethical order in itself. "My religion (Christianity) is a lot about love and forgiveness, and therefore I think one should at least try to forgive each other for one's own good." (Pupil 20). "We Muslims believe that one should forgive and it is important to forgive. One should treat fellow beings how you want to be treated." (Pupil 34). It is not easy to interpret the last two statements. They can be perceived as reflecting the religious categories mentioned earlier where the arguments for forgiveness were to avoid punishment or have the opportunity to be praised, which were both understood here as preserving the well-being of the individual. However the statements are seen here as defending an ethical order, since it also is possible to interpret them as convictions of Christianity and Islam respectively, religions that are understood as safeguarding forgiveness as a phenomenon and therefore as authoritative resources in upholding the ethical order.

The arguments given for why both aspects of forgiveness are important have here been placed in categories that express what objects the arguments can be said to defend. The arguments are not merely arguments that are more or less well developed or expressed. They are normative. They communicate different values and can be interpreted as indications of normative competences. An important question is, of course, how different normative statements relate to each other. Can the values that function as foundations of the arguments be better and worse? Is, for example, an argument for the importance of forgiveness stronger if it is based on the upholding of community and ethical orders rather than on the well-being of the individual?

5.6.2 *"If Not": A Clarifying Presentation Technique and an Argumentative Competence*

The feasibility of ranking arguments has been discussed here from the perspective of content. With regard to forms of arguments, both the syllabus and the assessment instructions are in favour of ranking arguments. Arguments can be more or less informed and developed, which the assessment instructions describe in terms of how well the pupils express meaning, consequences and problematisations. The syllabus does not explicitly demand assessment of the form of the arguments from the point of view of their clarity. At the same time arguments can be more or less clear and it is not unlikely that there are characteristics of, and techniques for making, clearer arguments. One such feature that has been identified in the material is the way of arguing for the importance of forgiveness by giving examples of what the *absence of forgiveness* would mean. In relation to the categories of defended values presented above, it may be added that the following four examples of the "if-not technique" defend the well-being of the individual (in the first example), friendship (in the second example) and the community and the continuity of a creative everyday life (the third and fourth examples). This way of presenting the arguments – looking at the consequences of not forgiving – makes their messages and their defended values quite clear. "[If] you do not forgive a person, the anger and the bitterness can make you into a different person. It becomes a kind of mask in front of your face that does not show who you really are and this affects everything in your life."(Pupil 15). "What would happen if you do not forgive someone, maybe just to retain your dignity or because it is too embarrassing? In worst case, you would lose a friend for life." (Pupil 14). "If one could not be forgiven [...] then everyone would walk around being angry at each other." (Pupil 24). "If you knew you would never be forgiven, you would never dare to do anything for fear of losing someone." (Pupil 32).

To turn a line of argument from showing what the presence of a phenomenon means, which is more or less the assumed perspective of the task, into showing what the absence of the phenomenon that one argues in favour of would mean, seems to be a way to strengthen and clarify an argument. "If not" is a technique for clarifying an argument that can be seen as a form of argumentative competence. The use of the method can also, however, be understood as an expression of an analytical competence. It can be related to Nussbaum's description of an Aristotelian way of reasoning, where the critical question to determine something's value is "if not", or more precisely; if not – would life then be less valuable and less consummated (1995, p. 73)? In this empirical study the technique has been identified from close readings of pupils' responses with the aim of identifying indications of ethical competence. The identification of this technique suggests that it not unlikely that there may be more such presentation techniques, which it might be possible to identify using analyses focusing specifically on such techniques.

5.6.3   Understanding of Forgiveness as an Existential Phenomenon: An Insightful Competence

The other main way to respond to the task, besides the argumentative way, is to clarify the meaning of forgiveness as an existential phenomenon. Ethical insight and existential understanding of this kind are here, in line with the theoretical tradition presented, interpreted as a form of ethical competence. These two ways of responding to the text are not mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite: they are to a large extent intertwined. Among the 38 pupils that argue for the importance of both aspects of forgiveness, forgiving and asking for forgiveness, 30 pupils also discuss at least some aspects of forgiveness as an existential phenomenon. Expressing and being clear about what forgiveness can mean existentially can be of value in arguing for its importance. This concerns the ability to problematise in particular, which according to the assessment instruction characterises well-developed reasoning.

Several of the existential understandings and ethical insights that are expressed in the pupils' responses concern the difficulties and delicateness of forgiveness as a situation for both parties. The overarching connection between such an existential understanding and the ability to argue for its importance is that an understanding of how difficult forgiveness is and of how much is at stake in the process makes it easier to argue for its importance, since these insights constitute arguments. The *pupils' responses differ* of course *in their way of* making this connection between insight and argument explicit, i.e. *turning insights into arguments*. This variety is shown in the following examples, where the connection is most clear in the last example. "Forgiving someone can be difficult especially if you have been deeply hurt by that person." (Pupil 11). "But forgiving is not just about forgiveness, you should also mean it with all your heart." (Pupil 20). "Forgiving someone can be both difficult and a relief." (Pupil 18). "Forgiving is also scary. When someone has made you sad, you let that person in again to maybe make new mistakes. But if you do not go against your fears you do not develop. Forgiving is also a sign of maturity. One lowers one's guard." (Pupil 1). The last answer can be interpreted primarily as an awareness of how difficult forgiveness is, how fragile human interaction is but also of how the potential of a community depends on the courage to challenge this existential fear and allow the possibility of a continuing communal life with absent or at least lowered guards.

The existential understandings and ethical insights exemplified above concern mainly the "forgiving" aspect of forgiveness. The understandings and insights that relate to the other aspect of forgiveness, asking for forgiveness, are of similar kinds. Here also, descriptions of the difficulties are present together with expressions of feelings like fear, pride and powerlessness. As earlier, the *answers differ concerning how explicit the connection between understandings* of the situation and *arguments* for the importance of asking for forgiveness is, which the following examples illustrate. "It takes courage to stifle your pride and ask for forgiveness and admit that you have done something wrong." (Pupil 18). "There is always a reason why you ask for forgiveness. When asking for forgiveness you have shown that you have matured

and really regretted what you have done." (Pupil 28). "I also believe that the person who asks for forgiveness grows in the eyes of the other person. One takes the initiative and actually shows oneself as weak. One grows as a person when one asks for forgiveness and when one forgives." (Pupil 1). "I really think that forgiveness is important both for the person who asks for it and the person who forgives. Just being able to ask for forgiveness shows that you have understood yourself what you have done wrong and that you truly regret it. Being able to swallow your pride and show yourself as humble towards the person that has the power to either forgive or judge. I think it is important to be able to overcome your own pride since it often takes over." (Pupil 41). The last pupil's response is also an example of how the ethical order, what it is that should be regarded as wrong, is given priority and a value that makes it worth risking being rejected by the other person, who is seen by the pupil as having that power.

5.6.4 Problematising Ethical Situations: The Need for Existential Understandings and Insightful Competences

As shown above, existential understandings and ethical insights are resources that one uses in order to anchor an argument. In an even clearer sense, the material in the sample shows that these competences are of importance in problematising forgiveness, which according to the current assessment instructions is something that characterises more advanced answers. Problematising a phenomenon can be understood as questioning familiar circumstances and thereby showing that they do not necessarily have to be understood as they usually are or as many people understand them. It can also mean showing critical aspects or conditions under which one pattern but not another can be expected to be valid. To realise what in a situation can be understood as critical or to grasp what an alternative to a certain situation would be presupposes existential understandings of and ethical insights into the situation at hand.

Most of the problematisations that occur in the pupils' responses can be understood as relating to the question of *whether it is possible to forgive everything*. In that way the responses really problematise the phenomenon forgiveness, particularly the importance of forgiving but also of course what one is being asked to forgive. There is also, however, among the answers an even more fundamental problematisation of forgiveness concerning the fact that people have *different perspectives on what is right or wrong*, diverse opinions of what has been described here as the ethical order. This can be understood as a questioning of an underlying assumption of the task, an assumption that has to be present in order to meaningfully argue for the importance of forgiveness.

One example of a pupil's response that addresses the problem with the phenomenon forgiveness when people have different perspectives on right and wrong, is expressed in the following way: "It's not always easy to ask for forgiveness if you

e.g. have done something that you yourself do not think is so bad but can hurt some people very much." (Pupil 37). There is no agreement upon what value to place on what has been done.

The other main way to problematise forgiveness, to discuss whether it is possible to forgive everything, is discussed both in general terms as a question that is not so easy to answer and as something that depends on certain factors. One such factor is the nature of what has happened. "I think there is a limit for what it is possible to forgive. If e.g. a man were to kill a person's child, one could perhaps ask for forgiveness but one could never be forgiven. Saying sorry is one thing but to be forgiven is something entirely different." (Pupil 7). Also the likeliness of recurrence is considered to be a factor to consider in the process of forgiveness. "For the one who forgives, it is important that the person who asks for forgiveness means what he says and learns not to do the same thing again." (Pupil 8). Both the statements of Pupil 7 and Pupil 8 touch upon another factor that has shown itself to be of importance for the possibility of forgiveness. This is the attitude of the actors, i.e. the approach of both the person that asks for forgiveness and the person that is asked to forgive, is of importance. The answers of Pupil 7 and Pupil 8 show awareness that saying something is one thing and meaning something is another. Among the answers stressing the importance of the attitude of the person that asks for forgiveness, one finds the idea that it is easier to forgive if the act was a mistake and not done on purpose. "I think it is important to forgive, yes, but I find it hard myself. If someone accidentally breaks something of mine then I can accept an apology if the person did not do it on purpose." (Pupil 46). To really regret an act is also an attitude that could be of importance for forgiveness. "It is important that I can be forgiven if one is truly repentant and knows that one has done something wrong." (Pupil 12). The time factor is another factor that can be of relevance to whether it is possible to forgive or not. On the one hand, it could be important to ask for forgiveness as soon as possible but on the other hand there is an awareness of forgiveness as a phenomenon that sometimes take time. "The earlier you do something about it the better." (Pupil 14) "If someone has done something that makes someone else very upset then it may take time before one can let it go, forgive and move on." (Pupil 19). "The person who asks for forgiveness must respect that the people that he/she asks for forgiveness need time to e.g. think." (Pupil 40). All the utterances that in different ways problematise forgiveness draw on existential understandings and ethical insights of what it means to be human and in need of forgiveness.

5.6.5   The Presence of Precise Concepts and Words: A Verbal Competence

The "thinking-aloud" teachers referred to at the beginning of the chapter stressed three characteristics of the pupils' responses as being of merit, although they were not features that were emphasised in the assessment instructions. The

characteristics were ethical insights, altruistic values and certain precise concepts that worked as tools for the pupils when they expressed their positions. The analyses of the assessment instructions presented in this chapter have shown that there are different messages in the assessment instructions concerning the importance of concepts. Forgiveness as a concept in itself appears in one place, the comment section, presented as an analytical concept, a perspective that is not followed up in any other section. In the comments on the examples of pupils' responses, in reference to the A-level example, the use of certain words, although it is mentioned, is not explicitly described as a merit. The use of certain words is not brought up in any other section. The assessment instructions in their way of dealing with conceptions/precise words are inconsistent and puzzling. Nowhere is the use of precise concepts or specific and appropriate vocabulary stressed as a merit. In the analyses of the 50 pupils' responses in this study, the use of such words or concepts has been noticed, however. A question of interest in itself is which words these are. The syllabus stresses such ethical concepts as freedom and responsibility for the 15-year-old pupils and others such as right, wrong, equality and solidarity for the younger ones. In previous research, for the "thinking-aloud" teachers, it was difficult to decide what "similar concepts" could mean, an expression that was used in both the RE syllabus and the assessment instructions for the younger children. Words that were noticed in the analyses of the 50 pupils' responses that seem to be used by the pupils as precise tools in expressing themselves, can be described as *words of an intermediate level*. They are not everyday words but neither are they overarching classical ethical ones. Instead words like conscience, remorse, mistake, second chance, redressing, relief, burden, liberation, praise, punishment, humbleness, judge, respect, confirmed, admit, pride, fear, courage, power, maturity and vulnerability seem to be of importance for the pupils in describing ethical situations, their understandings of those situations and in developing arguments. Some of these have also been shown in the examples above.

5.7 Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The aim of this chapter has been to present and discuss conceptions of ethical competence in relation to a sample of pupils' writings about forgiveness in a national test in religious education. As a general assumption, it seems reasonable that the answers given correlate with the questions asked, which here means that it would be likely that the pupils' responses would consist of perspectives that have been asked about in the task concerning forgiveness in the test. The basic instructions for the task ask the pupils to reason about why forgiveness can be important both for the person asking for forgiveness and the person who forgives. With regard to the various sub-competences used in this chapter in order to discuss ethical competence, it is obvious that a verbal (argumentative) competence is required and that an analytical competence underlies such a competence. The normative standpoint is in one sense fixed by the task, the importance of forgiveness is emphasised, but the arguments that pupils make are chosen by the pupils themselves and do express certain

values. This means that a normative competence is required even if it is of a non-content-specific, personal character. However it is not an object of assessment.

The combination of competences asked for in the ethical task is not surprising and neither is the emphasis on analytical and argumentative competences. In the knowledge requirements of the syllabus, these two competences can also be said to dominate, which is also true for the core content section. In the aim part of the syllabus, the demand for normative competence of a non-content-specific, personal character is more clearly shown, as it is in the general curriculum. Here also normative competences of a predetermined, content-specific, character are required. However, there are in the syllabus also sentences that can be interpreted as indicating the requirement for an additional kind of ethical competence. Firstly the core content section of the syllabus writes about daily moral dilemmas as if an awareness of the context of ethical analyses may be of importance, and secondly the knowledge requirements consider a line of reasoning to be of merit if it, among other things, is well-informed. This latter can be interpreted as an indication of requirements concerning a kind of existential understanding and ethical insight, here concerning daily moral dilemmas, for instance, in order to be able to reason in a well-informed way.

So, if a reasonable general assumption is that answers given by pupils correlate with questions asked, then the pupils' responses to the forgiveness task would consequently demonstrate argumentative and analytical competences. Previous research (involving assessing "thinking-aloud" teachers) has indicated, however, that pupils' responses to this task also demonstrate, to different degrees, a verbal (conceptual) competence, an altruistic normative competence and an insightful competence (Osbeck et al. 2015).

The findings of the analyses of the 50 pupils' responses confirm to a large extent the perspectives of the assessing "thinking-aloud" teachers referred to above. The pupils use arguments that defend different kinds of objects reflecting different values that are more or less egocentric/altruistic: the individual, the fellow being, friendship, a creative community and an ethical order. While the assessing "thinking-aloud" teachers regarded expressions of altruistic values as more advanced, it is an open question in this chapter whether answers that defend communal life should be regarded as more advanced than the ones that protect the well-being of the individual for instance. However in relation to moral development traditions such as the Kohlbergian tradition, such an idea would be quite reasonable (Kohlberg 1971). One could perhaps also point out that an interest in the common good is considered to be of importance in the Swedish school: for instance, the curriculum stresses common fundamental values. On the other hand, these values are to a rather large extent also of an individual character. At any rate it is reasonable to maintain that a line of reasoning that also shows awareness about values that are being defended through argumentation should be considered to be "developed" and of merit. The perspective of the knowledge requirements and assessment instructions, which involves focusing on the forms of the arguments rather than taking content and defended values into account, can in this respect be interpreted as counterproductive, since it risks training the pupils to disregard deeper value dimensions and in

this sense fails to develop their normative competences. The analyses of the pupils' responses have shown that value dimensions cannot be separated from the form of the arguments. Values are present in any case, and to ignore this means not learning to go to the bottom of the issue but solving it on a more superficial level. Consequently it seems paradoxical that values and forms of argument are separated in the curriculum in the knowledge field of ethics, where one really should learn to deal with values and also learn to prioritise certain fundamental values, and even certain virtues, as Nussbaum reminds us (1995, 2011). What have to be discussed are of course the criteria for prioritisation. A difficulty that is shown through the analyses of the pupils' responses is to decide what value to place on the defence of the individual as compared to the defence of the collective. This challenge is a fundamental, important and difficult one and can also be found in Nussbaum's advocacy of eudemonia, the fulfilment of a full, good human life, as a criterion for deciding which values to prioritise (1995, p. 26f.; 52; 71). The standpoint seems reasonable generally but, despite the fact that community and friendship are often in the foreground in this perspective, it is obvious that a full, good human life is however not *one* concept whose meaning is fixed and agreed upon.

The responses of the pupils demonstrate existential understandings and ethical insights in a similar way to that indicated by the teachers in the study (Osbeck et al. 2015). This is shown despite the fact that this is a kind of competence that is no more than hinted at in the requirements of the syllabus and is almost absent in the assessment instructions and in the task about forgiveness in the national test. Several of the existential understandings and ethical insights expressed concern the difficulties and delicateness associated with forgiveness, e.g. how hurt one can be, how exposed, powerless and scared one can feel. Existential understanding of forgiveness as a phenomenon and of how much is at stake is used in order to argue for the importance of forgiveness. Ethical insight is a kind of competence that together with an analytical competence underlies the verbal (argumentative) competence shown in the responses. The arguments draw on understandings of what forgiveness means, something that can be expressed more or less explicitly. If ethical insights and existential understandings represent kinds of competences that underlie the argumentative competence shown in the responses, they are even more clearly demanded for the highest grade. Here an ability to problematise forgiveness is required, which in turn presupposes an existential understanding about what forgiveness can mean, what the critical factors of the phenomenon are, what it does not necessarily have to mean and what alternatives to forgiveness may exist. The pupils' responses show that such ethical insights are used in order to problematise. It is, for instance, said that forgiveness becomes complicated when there is a lack of common understanding of what is right and wrong. There are also statements about the problems associated with a perspective where everything can be forgiven and about the chances of someone being forgiven as being related to certain critical factors such as the nature of the act, the likelihood that it will happen again, the time aspect and the attitude of the parties.

The previous study of the teachers who were assessing this specific forgiveness task also stressed the use of precise concepts as a competence that the students

should be given credit for. The analyses in this chapter have shown that the assessment instructions speak with two voices concerning this area, since the use of concepts is not described as a merit in the progression table but is nevertheless a part of the sample answer given for the highest grade, which is also mentioned in the comments, a contradiction that seems puzzling. However, ethical concepts are stressed in the core content section of the syllabus and a few examples are given. Despite this it is not clear what characterises ethical concepts. As has been expressed earlier, it is likely that the intention in the syllabus is that concepts should be used for ethical analysis, although "ethical concepts", as has been shown here, can also be understood as meaning, for example, concepts used to clarify the character of a relation, situation or action that is the object of an ethical analysis. A sharp existential understanding and ethical insight seems to be related to the presence of precise words that are on an intermediate level, i.e. words that are between everyday vocabulary and specific ethical concepts. Some of these words used in the responses are conscience, remorse and redressing.

The main findings of the analyses of the 50 pupils' responses to the national test task about forgiveness are that the responses show verbal (especially argumentative but also conceptual), analytical, normative and ethical insightful competences. These kinds of competences can be understood as intercorrelated, which does not mean, however, that one kind of competence can be reduced to another. The primary contribution of this chapter is the visualisation of existential understandings and ethical insights as forms of ethical competences and descriptions of what these competences can mean in ethical work. It has been shown that ethical insights underlie other explicitly mentioned ethical competences such as an argumentative competence and an ability to problematise ethical situations, which is also a central and critical competence, but one that previous research has shown to be neglected in policy documents (Jones 2009) and teachers' perspectives (Thornberg and Oğuz 2013). Ethical insights and existential understandings can be described as central but often tacit forms of ethical competences.

A consequence of the fact that ethical insights and existential understanding are to a large extent tacit, in the sense that they are not explicitly described as being important sub-competences of an overarching ethical competence, is that these kinds of competences are not being taught as much as they would have been if they had been named and brought out in the syllabus. The fact that ethical reasoning demands ethical insights and existential understandings means that ethics education cannot go directly into the teaching of analytical tools and models without risking that pupils will not develop sufficient knowledge to be able to argue and problematise in relation to the context of a given task in way that satisfies the assessment instructions. Therefore the teaching must include the existential context of a situation. On the basis of the Swedish syllabus, which prescribes daily moral dilemmas as core content, the teaching has to pay attention to what constitute relevant existential situations for the age group in question (e.g. Hallgren 2003; Hartman 2000b; Osbeck 2006; Tirri 2003). The teaching has to be conducted in such a way that the pupils' repertoires of perspectives concerning these situations are expanded. Here the theoretical perspective of Nussbaum can be understood as emphasising the

importance of thinking about formal and informal education in relation to each other (Taylor 1994; Thornberg 2006). Ethical insights are to a large extent developed informally in the discursive practices where one lives one's daily life. An awareness of the processes of everyday life in the classroom and school, where characters and values of certain kinds are being shaped, is therefore of the utmost importance. A collective reflection on these processes will also increase the individual's self-awareness, both the emotional and the cognitive dimensions, which in ethical reflections and insights are intertwined (Nussbaum 1995). One way to widen the pupils' existential repertoires and develop ethical insights without them having to experience everything themselves is to use narratives of different kinds, which also is stressed by Nussbaum (e.g. 1995, p.73; Leming 2000; Lesnick 2006). Fiction, fairy tales and folktales are examples of such narratives, but since ethics in Swedish schools is situated in the subject of RE it can be considered to be of importance also to work with religious stories and to use them as the cultural and existential heritage of all humanity that they are (Cöster 1982; Emanuelson 1998; Härenstam 2000; Skogar 1992). The importance of existential understandings and ethical insights for a well-founded ethical competence should not be tacit but should be consciously taken into consideration, in order to develop ethics education in Swedish schools.

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Chapter 6
Global Responsibilities and Ethics Education: To Be Assessed and If So How?

Karin Sporre

Abstract In the initial paragraphs of the Swedish curriculum from 2011 for the compulsory school grades 1–9 (Lgr11), some issues that are particularly emphasised are environmental perspectives, sustainable development and international perspectives. In the same context, an ethical perspective is described as giving a foundation for the competence of pupils to form their own standpoint.

At present, issues of global responsibility are being raised, especially in the light of the importance of global sustainable development, economically, ecologically and socially. However, given the urgency of such issues, the implicit normativity in policy documents promoting such an agenda for education raises questions, for example, about the freedom of pupils to think critically. Another question is what concrete critical issues are raised when global responsibility is brought up in a school context? As the study of ethics in the Swedish curriculum has been placed within the school subject of religious education, the discussions above have implications for religious education when it comes to pupils developing an adequate ethical competence.

The purpose of this chapter is to study the educational policy reflected in the Swedish curriculum Lgr11 and evaluated in the 2013 national tests and relate this to educational research and theoretical discussions of ethics, and in doing this evaluate the tests from 2013 and identify further aspects to be assessed.

The results show that global responsibility forms a significant part of the initial part of the curriculum, but thereafter, it is only to a quite limited extent mentioned in the syllabus for religious education and not tested as an ethical competence in the national tests of 2013. As issues related to global responsibility also form part of the content of other school subjects, the chapter briefly explores to what extent such issues are treated within them. It then becomes obvious that ethical perspectives are not brought up or tested, but the issues are rather treated from a disciplinary, factual point of view. How an integration between approaches in different subjects may be achieved is of the utmost importance for the development of a more complex understanding of ethical competence, its use and adequate assessment.

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6.1   Introduction

At present, the discussion of schools and classrooms as being part of the wider world is articulated, for example, in discussions on education and cosmopolitanism (Hansen 2010; Wahlström 2014). Another discussion of relevance to education relates to issues of citizenship, which have been raised especially in the context of migration as a global phenomenon, not least in a poverty-stricken world (Benhabib 2013). Another arena where issues of global responsibility are actualised relates to education and sustainability issues where, for example, questions around the value of nature, animals and human beings are articulated (Kronlid and Öhman 2013), as well as questions of how teaching (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2007) and learning take place (Manni et al. 2016) but also how to change educational strategies and philosophical underpinnings such as the epistemology of education (Lotz-Sisitka and le Grange 2010). A critical discussion on how to handle the need for change in the face of climate change in relation to pupils' autonomous learning has also been going on for some years (Jickling 1994; Kopnina 2014).

With these examples of studies and trends as a background where global responsibility is required, this chapter will explore how global responsibility is expressed in the Swedish curriculum (Lgr11 2011) and in the national tests of 2013.[1] The school subject religious education (RE) plays a central role in the analyses of these texts, as the ethics education of the Swedish compulsory school takes place within that subject. Furthermore, a crucial notion in the exploration of this chapter is ethical competence.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section consists of an analysis of the initial part of the curriculum[2] for the Swedish compulsory school, years 1–9. This section leads up to a tentative summarising definition of ethical competence as it is described there. The second section is an analysis of the syllabus for religious education with a focus on how ethical competence is elaborated there, including a review of how ethical competence was tested in the national tests for RE in 2013 (Nat. prov RE 2013). The third section gives a brief overview of how global responsibility is expressed in other school subjects, mainly those belonging to the social sciences, namely, geography, history and civics/social studies. Certain observations regarding the subjects belonging to the natural sciences will also be made. The fourth and concluding section is a critical concluding discussion where two questions are at stake: (a) How is the initial definition of ethical competence from the first part of the curriculum followed up in school subjects and their national tests? (b) If one were to assess this same ethical competence, what would it then be

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[1] The national test in religious education 2013 can be accessed at http://idpp.gu.se/forskning/utvecklingsprojekt/nationella-prov/religionskunskap/. (Retrieved 2015-04-08). The test is, as are all national tests from that year, published on the Internet in the Swedish language. National tests for the years following 2013 are not public but are classified information.

[2] Note that what is referred to here as the initial part of the curriculum is the more general part of the curriculum, not specific to any subject, while the later parts of the curriculum contain the syllabuses [*kursplaner*] for the individual subjects.

appropriate to assess? In the concluding discussion, a few perspectives from contemporary research and theory of ethics will be brought in. A more detailed description of the questions examined in this chapter will follow at the end of the first section, i.e. the analysis of the initial part of the curriculum.

6.2 Curricular Starting Points

6.2.1 Fundamental Values and Tasks of the School

As already stated, in the initial part of the Swedish curriculum for grades 1–9 (Lgr11 2011), there are expressions of what are here called global responsibilities. The first part of the curriculum has the title *Fundamental Values and Tasks of the School* (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 9–13)[3] followed by *Overall Goals and Guidelines* (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 14–21), and thereafter follow the syllabuses for the individual school subjects (Lgr11 2011: 22–263).

Looking at the very first paragraph of the curriculum, the following can be noted: the starting point is that the Swedish school system is based on "democratic foundations" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 9), followed by a sentence stating that pupils should develop knowledge and values. It is furthermore said that education should "impart and establish respect for human rights" (Lgr11 2011: 9) and the democratic values Swedish society is based on. The opening paragraph ends by emphasising that each and every person working in the school should encourage respect for the intrinsic value of every human being and the shared environment (Lgr11 2011: 9). So, to summarise, at the very start of the Swedish curriculum for the compulsory school, the importance of democracy, human rights, respect for the value of each and every person and a concern for the environment are highlighted.

To quickly compare with the former curriculum, Lpo94 (1994), three aspects have remained the same: (a) the emphasis on democracy as the foundation of the Swedish school system, (b) a common concern for the environment and (c) the respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings. What has been added in the 2011 curriculum is the instituting of respect for human rights and the democratic values of Swedish society. Another addition is the sentence stating that the educational system should promote all pupils' development of knowledge and values and a life-long yearning to learn (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 9).

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[3] All references in this chapter to the curriculum are to the English translation of the Swedish text, here marked as Lgr11[eng] 2011, as compared to Lgr11 2011, which refers to the Swedish text. When analysing the curriculum, I have used both texts.

6.2.2 Four Perspectives: Tasks of the School

Moving somewhat further into Lgr11 (2011) but still remaining in the first part of the curriculum, there are, under the subheading *Tasks of the school*, four perspectives that are emphasised. Three of these perspectives are crucial for the focus and argument of this chapter. The presentation of these perspectives starts with the sentence: "In all education, it is important that overall, well-balanced perspectives are established" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 11). What are these four overarching perspectives then, which it is important to establish in all education?

The first one is a *historical perspective*, which is said to enable pupils to develop an understanding of the present, as well as develop a preparedness for the future, and develop the ability to think in dynamic terms (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 11).

The second perspective is an *environmental perspective.* The purpose of this perspective is described as being not only to develop in pupils a responsibility for environmental issues that they themselves can act on and directly influence but also to develop a responsibility regarding global environmental issues. It is further stated that "teaching should illuminate how the functions of society and our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create sustainable development" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 12). So, here we meet the responsibility to locally care for the environment as well as finding a personal position regarding global environmental issues, and pupils are to receive education that provides knowledge of society's functioning in relation to sustainable development.

The third perspective is the *international perspective.* The purpose of this perspective, according to the curriculum, is to understand one's own reality from a global perspective and to create international solidarity, in order to prepare for a society with contact across cultural and national borders. Understanding issues of cultural diversity within one's own country is also related to this perspective.

The fourth and final perspective that is emphasised is an *ethical perspective.* This is described as being of importance to many of the issues brought up in school and to education in general. The perspective, it is said, should permeate life at school to give a foundation and so prepare pupils to take a stance of their own.

Here we have the four important perspectives, of which the last three (the environmental, the international and the ethical perspectives) are closely linked to the concerns of this chapter. However, in the rest of this chapter, the historical perspective will be left aside, as it is not directly linked to the issues of this chapter.

To give an idea of the general character of the introductory part of the Swedish curriculum, it can also be mentioned that the first part regarding fundamental values and tasks of the school has the following subheadings: "Understanding and compassion for others", "Objectivity and open approaches", "An equivalent education", "Rights and obligations", "Tasks of the school", "Good environment for development and learning" and "Each school's development" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 9–13). Furthermore, in the second paragraph of the curriculum, five values are named, often described as important values within the value foundation of the school (see

Sporre 2007b: 229;232–234).[4] They are "The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable…". These five values are the ones "that the school should represent and impart" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 9).

6.2.3 Overall Goals and Guidelines and an Ethical Stance

This overview of the introductory part of the curriculum, with the stated values of the first paragraph, the four perspectives and also the five values, is not complete unless some parts from the second introductory part of the curriculum are also mentioned. I refer to the part on the "Overall goals and guidelines", where norms and values pupils are to have *when they leave* the compulsory school are described, as well as knowledge to be developed. These overall goals are supposed to give directions for all the work of the school (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 12).

Under the first heading, "Norms and values", the first goal to be mentioned is that each pupil should be able to consciously make and express *ethical standpoints* based on knowledge of human rights and basic democratic values and also to include their personal experience when doing this. Secondly, it is mentioned as a goal of the school that all pupils are to respect the intrinsic value of other people. Thirdly, pupils are to reject oppression and degrading treatment of human beings and are also to assist in helping other people. Fourthly, the goal for schools is that pupils can empathise with the situation of other people and develop a will to act in accordance with others' best interests. Finally, the school is to see to it that pupils show respect both for the environment close to them and the environment seen from a wider perspective (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 14).

In the paragraphs following thereafter, it is stated with regard to norms and values that all those who work in schools should contribute to the development in pupils of a sense of community and feelings of solidarity as well as responsibility for people "outside of the immediate group" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 14). All those working in schools should also actively resist discrimination and degrading treatment between individuals and groups; additionally, they should show respect for the individual pupil and perform their daily work in a democratic way (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 14). When addressing the role of the teacher, the curriculum specifically mentions the obligation of teachers to "clarify and discuss with the pupils the basic values of the Swedish society" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 14) including their consequences for personal agency. Furthermore, the teachers are to openly communicate and discuss differing values, points of view and problems.

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[4] In Sporre (2007a) (25–44), I develop a more extensive and critical discussion of values of the curriculum, including certain ethnocentric tendencies in Lpo94, the curriculum that later was replaced by Lgr11. However, the problematic tendencies from Lpo94 have remained unchanged.

6.2.4 Beginning to Conclude: Consistency and Ethics

Based on these formulations of the overall goals and guidelines, one can note the importance given to an ethical stance as it is first mentioned under the overall pedagogical goals and guidelines for norms and values. The respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings and their rights, and resistance to discrimination and degrading treatment are also underlined. To empathise and understand the situation of others is furthermore mentioned as a vital goal, connected to agency benefiting the well-being of all. Finally the environment, both nearby and seen from a broader perspective, is given attention.

Additionally, two matters can be noted in the study of the initial part of the curriculum: (a) there is consistency between the different parts of the curriculum; and (b) for an ethicist reading the curriculum, attention is drawn to certain definitions of what ethics is about. Let me develop these observations somewhat and then conclude by formulating a tentative definition of ethical competence based on formulations in the introductory part of the curriculum.

To start with the observation about consistency between the part of the curriculum on overall goals and guidelines and the first part on fundamental values and tasks of the school, it may already be obvious to the reader from the analysis above that the texts are consistent with one another. This can, for example, refer to the repeated emphasis on respect for other human beings and their rights and the concern for the environment and democracy. Additionally, the text seems to be constructed so that values are expressed and explicated to some extent in the first part, and in the second one, they are "converted" into goals, i.e. to norms and values that are to be the result of the schooling process of the nine compulsory school years. The responsibility of all staff in this process, especially teachers, is also expressed.

Moreover, further on in the text (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 15–16), when the overall goals in terms of knowledge (i.e. not norms and values) are stated, the capacity to interact with people on the basis of knowledge about similarities and differences between living conditions, culture, language, religion and history is mentioned, as well as issues of knowledge about national minorities in Sweden. Also mentioned is the acquisition of knowledge that promotes the conditions for a good environment and sustainable development (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 16). These examples can serve as further examples of consistency in the curriculum in terms of values, goals, norms and knowledge. It is also important to note that when goals in the context of knowledge are described, the capacity to make use of critical thinking and independently formulate "standpoints based on knowledge and ethical considerations" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 16) is mentioned. This mentioning of critical thinking and certain independence as being of importance in an ethical stance is something that I want to take note of for the discussion in the rest of this chapter, as it can be seen as being a significant aspect also of ethical competence.[5]

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[5] In Chap. 3 of this book, a thorough discussion of the importance of an argumentative critical competence within ethics education is developed. However, here critical thinking is regarded as one of several aspects of ethical competence.

Given the second observation above, relating to the resemblance between the curriculum text and possible definitions of ethics, I want to bring into the discussion the work of Harald Ofstad, a Swedish-Norwegian moral philosopher from the twentieth century, who in one of his texts defined what ethics is about in the following way:

> Ethics is taking seriously that which is serious. What is serious is that human beings and animals suffer, are humiliated and do not fare well. Taking that seriously means getting involved, gathering as accurate knowledge as possible, and trying to act in such a way that the world may become less evil. (Ofstad 1982: 10) [Author's translation]

In the goals of schools as outlined above, certain characteristics of ethics in line with this definition are clearly visible:

- A concern for human beings and for the environment
- A necessity for an active stance that promotes the well-being of all
- An emphasis on agency
- Action being based on adequate knowledge and basic values

Where there is a slight divergence between Ofstad's definition and the curriculum is in the explicit mentioning of animals in the definition and the use of the word "environment" in the curriculum. This exemplifies a certain difference in emphasis. Mentioning animals, as in the definition, brings in the matter of the value of animals in relation to human beings – discussed in moral philosophy (see Stenmark 2000) – whereas the mentioning of "environment" brings in the socio-economic as well as natural science perspectives on the matters of environmental destruction, climate change, etc. Of course this does not mean that the issues are not related but rather that different approaches exist.

6.2.5   Ethical Competence: A Tentative Definition

This analysis of the texts of the initial two parts of the curriculum brings about certain conclusions regarding *ethical competence*, the first and overall one being: Ethical competence is given an important standing when it comes to the achieving of the overall goals of the Swedish compulsory nine years of education, not least when it comes to the development of norms and values.

Secondly, the way the competence is described indicates an emphasis on (a) it having its basis in the knowledge of human rights and democratic values and its being related to personal experience. In addition, the competence is described as being a capacity to make decisions and express them based on the above. Additional criteria for the ethical stance that are expressed are (b) the respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings and resistance to oppression and degrading treatment of people. Thereafter special notice is given to (c) the capacity to empathise with other

people with a will to act with others' best interest at heart. Another capacity is (d) the use of a critical capacity, already mentioned, when independently taking a stance, based also on relevant knowledge. Finally, it has to be noted once again (e) that the concern for the environment nearby and from a broader perspective forms one area, especially mentioned as something that pupils are supposed to develop their ethical stance in relation to.

From the above, I would like to state that a tentative understanding of three crucial capacities that are part of an ethical competence in the Swedish curriculum has been derived, namely, (a), (c) and (d) above. In contrast to these capacities, point (b) above can be said to represent criteria for ethical competence, and point (e) formulates one area where ethical competence is to be applied. So *ethical competence*, in sum, *is to be able to consciously formulate and express an ethical stance based on knowledge where the values of democracy and human rights as well as personal experience are of vital importance. The competence is also to include a capacity to empathise with other people and their situations and to prepare for action with the well-being of others in focus. In addition, the competence is to include an aspect of critical thinking and independence vis-à-vis others in the formulation of the stance.* Criteria for the formulation and expression of an ethical stance are then (1) *the respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings* and (2) *resistance to oppression and degrading treatment of people.* Additionally, *concern for the environment nearby and from a broader perspective* is one area of special importance for pupils to develop their ethical stance on.

6.2.6 Task of This Chapter, Global Responsibility and Ethical Competence

After this analysis, it is obvious that an *ethical competence* thus described is a central goal of the Swedish compulsory school. However, at the same time, it has become clear that another important concept in this chapter, namely, *global responsibility*, is also thoroughly anchored in the introduction of the Swedish curriculum, where concerns about the environment and sustainable development, the well-being of people and the solidarity with people both nearby and further away are repeatedly emphasised, and the need to understand a more multicultural Swedish situation is mentioned.

So two conceptually crucial components of the chapter have been demonstrated to have their basis in the curriculum, and in addition, ethical competence has been described in relation to one definition of ethics and tentatively summarised.

What will follow next is an exploration of how ethical competence and global responsibility are positioned and expressed in ethics education. As already stated, ethics education has its special place within religious education. This leads to the following set of questions:

 (i) What kind of ethical competence is described in the syllabus for religious education? If global responsibility is mentioned, how is that done?
(ii) How is ethical competence tested in the national tests for RE? What kind of references are there to global issues?

However, as ethical competence in this chapter is particularly tied to global responsibilities and as such issues can also be found in other school subjects, for example, in the syllabuses of geography, history, civics/social studies and the natural sciences, the following questions are also studied:

(iii) What global issues, if any, are mentioned in the syllabuses and national tests for the school subjects geography, history and civics/social studies and the subjects of the natural sciences? What explicit ethical aspects are expressed in relation to them, in syllabuses and national tests?

Through the answering of these questions both the ethical competence described in the syllabuses, and what was tested in the national tests of 2013, will be clarified. Additionally, the presence of issues of global responsibility in syllabuses and national tests for RE, geography, history, civics/social studies and natural sciences will be clarified, as well as explicit ethical dimensions of these syllabuses and national tests. The purpose of this is to identify aspects that can contribute to a concluding critical discussion around ethical competence, global responsibility and its assessment. It ought to be mentioned also that for the sake of limiting this task, other school subjects than the above-mentioned ones are not taken into account in the analysis, and the analysis of the social science subjects is more extensive than the analysis of the natural science subjects.

Methodologically speaking, this chapter represents a qualitative content analysis of texts, the texts being the curriculum, syllabuses and national tests. The Swedish curriculum, including the syllabuses for each subject, is translated into English and is available on the Internet (Lgr11[eng] 2011). References in the text are to the English version, while both the Swedish (Lgr11 2011) and English versions (Lgr11[eng] 2011) have been used in the interpretation of these same texts. The national tests from 2013 are available on the Internet, unfortunately only in the Swedish language. Let us now turn to the first question above regarding ethical competence as described in the initial part of the curriculum as compared to the description given within the syllabus of the school subject religious education.

6.3   Ethics Education in Swedish RE

6.3.1   Ethics Education in the Syllabus

The syllabus for religious education consists, as do all syllabuses for school subjects, of three parts: (1) Aim, (2) Core content and (3) Knowledge requirements (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 186–198). The syllabus covers school years 1–9 and does not

detail what should be achieved in each school year but rather groups together the achievements of years 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9 in three distinct parts. Furthermore, up until school year 5, no grades are given to Swedish pupils; grades are given from year 6 and onwards. The grades given are from A to F, A being the highest grade and F indicating that a pupil has not passed. For the grades A–E, the syllabus, under the knowledge requirements, describes what is required for a particular grade. For F nothing is said, and consequently it can be said to represent the absence of the requirements for A–E. As the interest here is syllabuses and national tests, and as the tests are performed in years 6[6] and 9 (but not year 3), what is said in the syllabus for RE in terms of aim, core content and knowledge requirements for years 6 and 9 is what is studied. The same aims are given for years 6 and 9, while core content and knowledge requirements are different depending on the age level.

6.3.1.1 Aim

When studying the syllabus with a focus on ethics education and ethical competence as expressed in the syllabus for RE, what first comes to mind is that ethics seems like something added onto the study of religions, in the sense that it comes only when the aims of the study of religions have been thoroughly outlined. In practice this means that under the heading "Aim", ethics education is first mentioned in the fourth paragraph out of five, before the summary of the paragraphs. There ethics is mentioned in the context of what education should encourage in pupils, namely (mentioned in the following order), reflection over existential issues [Sw. *livsfrågor*, called life issues in the English version of the syllabus], reflection over one's own identity and then, thirdly, reflection over one's *ethical attitudes*.

However, if ethical attitudes come third in the fourth paragraph, in the fifth and last paragraph, ethics is given space when it is stated that pupils are to be given opportunities to be able to analyse and take a stance on ethical and moral issues. Pupils are also, through their education, to be able to develop an understanding of how values are connected to religions and other worldviews. The education is also to contribute to pupils being prepared for responsible action in relation to themselves and their surroundings.

The ability [Sw. *förmåga*] related to ethics education that is formulated thereafter in the summarising paragraph of the aims is that pupils are to be able to discuss and argue around moral issues and values by the use of ethical concepts and models.

Bearing in mind the richer description of ethical competence from the introductory part of the curriculum, what is immediately striking here is that the understanding of ethical competence seems to have been narrowed down, e.g. the connection made in the curriculum between ethical competence, human rights and basic democratic values is absent. Furthermore, with regard to the skill or ability that is formu-

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[6]The practice of giving national tests in school year 6 in RE has been abandoned from 2016. Consequently national tests were carried out in RE three times between 2013 and 2015 in year 6. In year 9 they continue.

lated in the summary of aims, the capacities of empathising with others and critically approaching moral issues are absent. The skill that is mentioned is to be able to discuss and argue around moral issues and values, i.e. strong emphasis is put on argumentative aspects of ethical competence. The two criteria (b) and the area of special concern (e) from the definition above are also absent.

6.3.1.2 Core Content

Moving on then to the part where the core content is detailed in the syllabus, this part has four different headings, the same for years 4–6 and years 7–9, namely: Religions and other outlooks on life; Religions and society; Identity and life issues; and Ethics. The central content of the subject is expressed in brief bullet points, and for pupils in years 4–6, the core content in ethics is summarised in three points:

- "Some ethical concepts, such as right and wrong, equality and solidarity.
- Daily moral questions concerning the identities, roles of girls and boys, and gender equality, sexuality, sexual orientation, and exclusion and violation of rights.
- Questions about what a good life can be, and what it may mean to do good" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 179).

For pupils in years 7–9, the stated core content is summarised in four bullet points. They are:

- "Daily moral dilemmas. Analysis and argumentation based on ethical models, such as consequentialist and deontological ethics.
- Views of the good life and the good person are linked to different kinds of ethical reasoning, such as virtue ethics.
- Ethical questions and the view of people in some religions and other outlooks on life.
- Ethical concepts which can be linked to questions concerning sustainable development, human rights and democratic values, such as freedom and responsibility" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 180).

To comment briefly on the stated core content, it is possible to see in both cases that for the younger pupils as well as the older ones, attention is given to the bringing up of daily moral issues – meaning as I interpret it that these should be moral problems the children and young people are familiar with. Secondly, there is an emphasis on the learning of concepts for the younger pupils and on analysis and argumentation based on the use of models of ethical theories for the older age group. The question of what a good life can be, and what it means to do good, is to be dealt with by the younger children, while the older ones are to connect such a discussion of a good life to ethical theory, e.g. virtue ethical theory. Where the description of core content differs between the age groups is that issues related to "view of people" [bullet point three above, Sw. *människosyn*; cf. Eng. human dignity] are regarded as core content only for older pupils, as are issues of sustainable development, human

rights and democratic values, where democracy is exemplified by the values of freedom and responsibility.

6.3.1.3 Knowledge Requirements

While the core content is described in brief bullet points, the knowledge requirements are formulated more extensively but must still be said to be quite brief (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 181–188). They are formulated as knowledge requirements for the end of year 6 and year 9, respectively. They start in both cases with the requirements for grade E, the lowest pass-grade, and move via grade C to grade A. For the grades D and B, the requirement is that the level below (E and C, respectively) is reached but also that most of the requirements for the level above, C and A, are acquired. With the specific interest here in ethics education and ethical competences, it is relevant to note that the knowledge requirements for ethics education come in the latter part of the texts, meaning that the structure, or order, of putting religion first is the same as in the parts on aims and core content, as earlier mentioned.

Looking at the knowledge requirements for year 6 (summarised on pages 185–186), the focus in the requirements is on reasoning, on reflection and on argumentative capacity, with the use of a few concepts underlined. What distinguishes the requirements for grades E–A from each other is the degree of excellence in reasoning, reflecting and using concepts. This means that the focus in the knowledge requirements is on whether the ethical concepts are correctly used, whether the reflections are in line with the subject under discussion and whether the way of arguing moves the discussion forward and broadens it. At the pass level, grade E, this can be said to mean that if a pupil can discuss, on an elementary level, daily moral issues and what it means to do good, and reflect, and use a few ethical concepts in a mostly functional way, then the pupil passes. A different aspect of particular interest here is that a critical capacity is addressed in another of the goals, namely, the capacity that is to be used in relation to the use of Internet sources. The context of the critical capacity is, however, not connected to ethics but to searching for information about religions and other worldviews.

Moving now to the knowledge requirements for year 9 (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 183–184) these focus on the capacity of pupils to discuss moral issues and values and support their arguments in doing so, for example, by the use of ethical concepts and models. Also at this level, it is the capacity to do this with different degrees of excellence that distinguishes pupils from each other. What can be seen in the formulation of the knowledge requirements as a difference between year 6 and year 9 is that the issues for pupils in year 6 are to be daily moral issues, while the qualifier "daily" is left out for year 9; rather the knowledge requirements can be understood to mean moral issues in a more general sense. The critical capacity, noted in the requirements for year 6, is also present for year 9, and here as well it refers to critically evaluating sources when studying religions and worldviews.

6.3.1.4   Conclusion

Given the descriptions of aim, core content and knowledge requirements presented above from the syllabus for religious education, the emphasis on ethics as having to do with argumentation and the use of ethical concepts, plus the use of models in year 9, becomes obvious. Critical thinking and independence in formulating a stance are not connected to the aim, core content and knowledge requirements specified for ethics, nor is the capacity to empathise with others and their situation and to strive to act with their best interests at heart mentioned. Regarding global responsibility, the only mention of such issues comes when the core content for years 7–9 is described, and sustainable development, human rights and democratic values are mentioned, but apart from that, it is absent for both years 6 and 9 in the aims and knowledge requirements, as well as being absent in the core content described for years 4–6. So to conclude, the way ethical competence is linked to central values like democracy, human rights, the respect for human dignity and concern for sustainable development in the initial part of the curriculum seems to get lost when the aims, core content and knowledge requirements for ethics education are described in the syllabus for religious education.

6.3.2   Ethics Education as Tested in National Tests

These conclusions bring us to the next set of questions, namely: (ii) *How is ethical competence tested in the national tests for religious education? What kind of references are there to global issues*? We must now look more closely into the actual tasks from the Swedish national tests of 2013 (Nat. prov RE 2013), where pupils' competence in ethics was tested. The testing of ethical competence was, as already noted, included in the test for religious education. In year 6 the number of tasks testing ethical competence was four out of 21 and, for year 9, three out of 25 tasks, these being the total number of tasks designed to test ethical competence. The actual tests from 2013 are, as has been mentioned already, available on the Internet, but there is also information as well as instructions to teachers regarding how the tests are to be evaluated. All this material is available in Swedish at http://www.npsoportal.se/amnesproven-ak-6-2013/.[7]

6.3.2.1   Tasks in Test: Year 6

Describing the test with all its tasks, one can say that the tasks are varied, meaning that sometimes the task is to match a statement and a particular concept, sometimes it is a multiple choice task and sometimes a story gives a background and leads into

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[7] Retrieved 2015-04-08.

the writing of a shorter or longer written assignment. The tests also have illustrations and pictures. Now we turn to the tasks testing ethical competence.

The first task in the year 6 test has a story as a background. It is about two girls who have been friends for a long time but have also during the last year made friends with a few more children in the same class, both boys and girls. One of these two friends has a problem with perspiration – and the task in this case is to discuss whether her friend is going to bring it up with her or not. In the essay the pupils are supposed to write, they are to use two of the words "responsibility", "wrong", "right", "duty" and/or "fair" [Sw. *schysst*]. They are also to argue for why they think the way they do, and what possible consequences one way of acting would bring as compared to another.

The second task focuses on the four concepts, "justice", "solidarity", "empathy" and "equality". In each of four different questions, the pupils are given a statement and are asked to respond by choosing one concept from three alternatives. Two examples of these four questions (and suggested concepts) are (1) "Boys and girls are to be treated alike". The possible concepts to choose between are then "empathy", "solidarity" and "equality". Pupils are asked to write down their motive for their choice of answer. Another example of a statement is the following: (2) "If I see someone who seems to be excluded, I show that I want to be a friend to that person", with the available concepts to choose between "justice", "solidarity" and "equality". Also here the motive for the choice is to be written down. Out of the remaining two statements, one deals with the number of hours allowed for sports training in a gym hall, which is divided equally between the boys' and the girls' teams. The fourth one deals with same-sex marriages, which is allowed according to the Swedish law. The concepts the pupils can choose between to comment on this matter are "empathy", "justice" and "equality".

The third task for pupils in year 6 deals with violations [Sw. *kränkning*]. The pupils are to write an essay and are given three sentences as an instruction. The theme is introduced in the following way: "Your task is now to imagine a situation where a violation takes place. Describe the situation briefly and give reasons for why it can be called a violation. Give examples of what can be done so the situation gets better." [Author's translation, here, as well as in the examples above].

The fourth and last task in the national test for pupils in year 6 is introduced through a chat conversation between two pupils. It starts with one pupil, Kim, saying to another, Stromma, that on the website for their school class, Kim has seen that they have homework in religion for tomorrow, and Kim asks Stromma for the notes she has taken from the lessons the same day. Kim has been absent due to illness and could therefore not be present for the group work, which he explains when Stromma asks why he did not take part. Kim asks again for the notes, but Stromma does not want to forward them and excuses herself by saying that her mother now needs the computer. This ends the chat conversation that introduces this task. In the task the children are asked to discuss the situation from the perspective of Kim and Stromma, respectively, and indicate what possible consequences their way of handling the situation could have. When discussing this, the pupils are to use at least two out of

the following concepts: responsibility, wrong, right, fair and obligation. Similar concepts may also be used.

6.3.2.2 National Test Year 6: Some Observations

Looking at these four tasks for pupils in year 6 and the testing of their ethics competence, one immediate observation is that pupils' capacity to use concepts, discuss and argue, give motives, discuss consequences and change perspectives is what is tested. This is done by asking pupils to respond to fictitious situations (a friend with a perspiration problem, giving help with notes for homework or not), or statements (examples mentioned above), or in one task pupils themselves were asked to invent an example of a violation. The concepts that are made available to the pupils in the different tasks are responsibility, wrong, right, fair, obligation, empathy, solidarity, equality and justice. The first four concepts are repeated in two tasks, while the next four concepts are used within the same task as possible responses to four alternative statements. If one compares the tasks relating to ethics (four tasks) to those in the overall test in religious education (17 tasks), the latter ones must be said as a totality to be more varied, in, for instance, testing knowledge about different aspects of religion. The capacity to critically evaluate sources when seeking information is tested in relation to religions and worldviews.

Part of a possible background to the test's emphasis on the use of concepts and argumentation is clarified in the instructions to teachers regarding the grading of the pupils' results. There it is explained that the test in religious education is to test four (out of five) different abilities [Sw. *förmågor*] in the school subject. Then the ability that is to be tested in ethics is described thus: "Discuss and argue around moral issues and values using ethical concepts and models" (Bedömningsanvisningar 2013: 4) (assessment instructions for teachers, see website mentioned above) [author's translation]. The knowledge requirements from the syllabus, quoted in the Bedömningsanvisningar, state that the test is to evaluate whether the pupil is able to discuss daily moral issues and what it could mean to do good. Furthermore, it is quoted that in doing this, the pupil is to be able to reflect and use ethical concepts in an adequate way. The formulation of the capacity to be tested in Bedömningsanvisningar (2013) does not use exactly the same wording as the syllabus but cannot on the other hand be said not to be based on the wording in the syllabus. It mirrors some of the wording, even though it represents an interpretation, or maybe rather a choice in formulation where alternative ways of formulating the ability could have been possible. Where the constructors of the test have also made choices is, of course, in the choices of concrete examples, in the way they have "dressed" the tasks in the test.

The observations above have given a response to the first part of the question (ii), namely, how ethical competence is tested for year 6. When it comes to the second of these questions, namely, what kind of references there are to global issues in the national tests of 2013 when ethical competence is tested for school year 6, the answer is: none. No references are made to global issues/responsibility when ethical competence is tested; rather the problems that are brought to the children's attention,

and to which they are asked to respond, deal mainly with interpersonal relation-
ships, mostly from the personal sphere, like friendship and relationships in school.
There are also examples of the division of time for sports teams and views on same-
sex marriages, but no global responsibility issues are tested.

6.3.2.3   Tasks in Test: Year 9

The first task, out of three, to test the ethical competence of pupils completing com-
pulsory school after nine years, centres on the concept forgiveness – described as an
important ethical concept in the instructions to the task. Furthermore, in the instruc-
tions, reference is made to personal experience, and the word "maybe" is used –
maybe the pupils have experienced being forgiven or have forgiven someone. In the
actual task, the pupil is asked to reason about why forgiveness can be of importance
both to the one asking for forgiveness and the one forgiving (pupils' responses to
this particular task form the material for the discussion of Chap. 4 of this book).

The second and third tasks that test ethical competence are the two that come last
and so conclude the test for religious education. The tasks are also related content-
wise and deal with models of ethical theories. In the first of these two, the pupils are
asked to match three types of ethical theories with descriptions of three situations.
The three types of theories are (1) intentionalist ethics [Sw. *sinnelagsetik*], (2) con-
sequentialist ethics [Sw. *konsekvensetik*] and (3) deontological ethics [Sw. *plikte-
tik*]. Synonyms are also given for the three theories, being, respectively, disposition
ethics [Sw. *avsiktsetik*], effect or result ethics [Sw. *effekt-eller resultatetik*] and rule
ethics [Sw. *regeletik*]. Pupils are then to match these three kinds of ethical theories
with three descriptions of actions. Alternative (a) describes a situation where one
chooses between two acts and chooses the one with the best consequences, even if
the act itself does not seem totally good. In alternative (b) an act is described as
being considered as right if it follows a moral rule. Alternative (c) describes a case
where an act is performed by someone who means well, and the act is then consid-
ered good, even if the result does not turn out as foreseen. If the intention is good
the act is good, the text says.

After the matching of the names of the theories (1–3) with descriptions of them
(a–c), the next and third task follows. The pupils are then introduced to the question
of the death penalty through a brief text and an image (of a noose). The facts that the
last Swedish execution took place in Stockholm in 1910 and that some countries like
the USA and China still have the death penalty are mentioned. Discussions about
reinstating the death penalty, which can come up in relation to brutal crimes, also
form part of the background given to the question. The pupils are asked to use the
models from the earlier task to argue for and against the death penalty. They get help
with "sentence starters" like "A person holding a deontological ethical position
would probably say that …", or " Whether the death penalty is right or wrong can be
discussed. A consequentialist ethicist would probably say that …", or "I think that an
intentionalist ethicist would probably …". After the task, two pages with lines are
given indicating that there is space for pupils to give quite a considerable answer to
the question (Ämnesprov, läsår 2012/2013. Religionskunskap, Delprov B: 16).

6.3.2.4   National Test Year 9: Some Observations

The three tasks testing ethical competence, the one on forgiveness and the two on models of ethical theories in the last task applied to the death penalty, are different in character. The one on forgiveness allows pupils to use their own experience and their empathy in a free writing exercise, while the second asks pupils to match the name of a kind of ethical theory with a description of that theory. The third asks for an argumentative discussion based on these models. Both these questions draw on a meta-classification of ethical theories, which requires that pupils be familiar with this system of classification, called ethical models in the test. While the structure of the first of these two tasks involves matching a–c with 1–3, and so allows the possibility of matching without really understanding, the second one asks for a longer argumentative answer based on knowledge of the models. With some basic knowledge combined with the information from the earlier task, the task can probably be solved. Argumentative capacity is also asked for in the task on forgiveness, although the fact that the task is in the personal sphere also allows for pupils' own experiences to filter through. With regard to what kind of ethical competencies are tested, one can say also that in the tasks for year 9, an argumentative capacity and additionally a knowledge of models representing a meta-classification of ethical normative theories (prescribing what is a morally right or wrong action) are what is asked for. The first of the three tasks relates to the interpersonal field, to personal relationships, while the third task relates to a societal problem, namely, what kind of penalty is appropriate to what kind of crime. And with regard to the underlying question of whether, or when, a society has the right to take an individual's life, however, that issue is not explicitly addressed as an issue relating to the respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings, which could have been a possibility in line with the initial part of the curriculum (and formulated as a criterion there).

   To the other question at stake in this chapter, whether issues relating to global responsibility are tested, the answer is no.

6.3.2.5   Ethical Competence in the Syllabus and Tests in RE: A Summary

In 6.2.5 of this chapter, a tentative definition based on the introductory part of the curriculum was formulated, namely, *ethical competence*, in sum, *is to be able to consciously formulate and express an ethical stance based on knowledge where the values of democracy and human rights as well as personal experience are of vital importance. The competence is also to include a capacity to empathise with other people and their situations, and to prepare for action with the well-being of others in focus. In addition, the competence is to include an element of critical thinking and independence vis-à-vis others in the formulation of the stance.*

It has become obvious from the analysis here in 6.3.1 of aim, core content and knowledge requirements for RE, as well as of the 2013 national tests in RE (6.3.2), that neither the syllabus nor the tests have such a broad understanding of ethical competence as is expressed in the first and introductory part of the curriculum and summarised above. This conclusion is valid both for the competences described and the way the competences are connected to crucial values in the definition. The one capacity that seems almost exaggerated in the syllabus and not least in the tests is the capacity to argue and to use concepts and models. The capacity that involves the use of personal experience is mirrored in three tasks in the tests (friendship, giving help with school notes or not, forgiveness) but links to democracy and human rights as crucial values are not made in the tasks when it comes to the forming of a stance, a position. An explicit mention of these values comes only at one point, namely, as part of the core content in the syllabus for year 9. A critical capacity as a competence in ethics, mentioned above in the definition, is, in the syllabus and the test, connected to the study of religions and worldviews and not to ethical issues.

The tentative definition based on the initial part of the curriculum also included two criteria for the formulation and expression of an ethical stance, namely, *the respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings* and *resistance to oppression and degrading treatment of people.* These criteria are not mentioned in the syllabus. The second criterion could be seen as having been tested in the task for pupils in year 6, to write a short essay on what a violation is, but without an explicit reference, e.g. to the value of each and every person, it is questionable what kind of learning of values can come out of the task. In the task for year 9 as well, the principle of the intrinsic value of all human beings could have been an alternative way to construct a task on the death penalty. Additionally, the area of special interest (mentioned in the initial part of the curriculum), the *concern for the environment nearby and from a broader perspective*, is not tested and is only briefly mentioned in the syllabus. International solidarity is not referred to, nor are issues regarding migration and cultural encounters as ethical issues.

There are four and three tasks, respectively, in the year 6 and year 9 national tests that test ethical competence. Several more are devoted to different aspects of religious education. If more tasks were set aside for ethical issues, more issues could of course be brought up. However, the tests as they were in 2013 tested an argumentative capacity and focused on concepts and models; they did not formulate tasks in relation to democracy and human rights, nor explicitly link tasks to the respect for the intrinsic value of human beings, nor give examples of problems related to sustainable development. These conclusions bring us to the next section of this chapter.

6.4   Global and Ethical Issues in Other School Subjects

In this next section, we will explore the syllabuses and national tests of school subjects other than RE, and the guiding questions there are as follows: (iii) *What global issues, if any, are mentioned in the syllabuses and national tests, for the school*

subjects geography, history and civics/social studies and the subjects in the natural sciences? What explicit ethical aspects are expressed in relation to them, in syllabuses and national tests? This more brief exploration will take us into (a) the syllabuses of geography (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 150–162), history (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 163–175), civics/social studies (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 189–202) and natural sciences (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 105–149) and thereafter (b) into the national tests of 2013 for the same school subjects.[8] The choice of these school subjects is made on the basis that global issues may have a place as part of what is taught and learnt in them – and the interesting question is then to what extent do ethical aspects come up in these subjects, and is ethical competence explicitly asked for or tested?

6.4.1   Ethical Competence in the Syllabuses for Geography, History, Civics/Social Studies and Natural Sciences

Starting with the syllabus for the school subject *geography*, we find that this is one of the places in the curriculum where issues of sustainable development, particularly economic and social aspects thereof, are given considerable space in the aim, core content and knowledge requirements of the subject. It forms a particular theme, one out of the three main themes, and consequently is an integrated part of the subject. For example, how the human being, nature and society interact is foundational for the school subject; conflicts of interest around natural resources are to be one aspect of the knowledge that pupils develop, as is also an understanding of how the future can be influenced with the purpose of developing a more acceptable living environment for all. The word *ethics/ethical* actually appears twice in the text of the syllabus. The first time it appears is under the overall aim of the subject when the capacities the pupils are to develop are summarised. Pupils are then, through their education in geography, to be able to "assess solutions to different environmental and development issues based on considerations concerning ethics and sustainable development" (Lgr11 (eng) 2011: 151). The second time the word ethics/ethical appears is under the knowledge requirements for year 6. There it is stated that pupils are to be able to develop "informed proposals on ethical-environmental choices and prioritisations in everyday life" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 155–156). However, for year 9 nothing is mentioned about ethical competence. In relation to global responsibility in general, as already indicated, knowledge in relation to sustainable development forms a crucial part of the subject, but as noted, ethics and ethical competence are only briefly mentioned.

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[8] For geography, history and civics/social studies (and RE), the tests are available at http://www. npsoportal.se/amnesproven-ak-9-2013/ (retrieved 2015-04-09). For the natural sciences subjects (biology, physics and chemistry) year 6, the tests are available at http://npno6.se/page/2013-ars-prov.php (retrieved 2015-04-09). The tests for year 9 are to be found at http://www.edusci.umu.se/ np/nap/tidigare-givna-prov/ (retrieved 2015-04-09). All tests are published in the Swedish language. Tests for the years following 2013 are not public but are classified information.

Moving on to the 2013 national test in geography, first to year 6, what was then assessed? One capacity out of the four to be evaluated was referred to as "The capacity to assess solutions to different environmental and developmental issues by means of deliberations around ethics and sustainable development" (author's own translation, Delprov B, År 6, Nat. prov i geografi 2013, p. 16). The four tasks that evaluate this capacity dealt with (a) people's reading ability and poverty in the world, (b) the percentage of girls and women who can read, (c) what kind of choices one can argue for when choosing to buy a particular bar of chocolate and related implications for sustainability issues and finally (d) arguing for which of the two alternative choices of road construction would be preferable, given their implications for animals and nature, human beings and businesses and transportation. Looking at these four issues, one can definitely conclude that they involve ethical dilemmas. However, looking at the construction of the tasks, pupils were asked to argue for one or another solution, from explanatory factors or from the perspectives of different parties involved, but no ethical concepts or tools were offered to assist the pupils in solving the tasks. They were asked to approach them on a fact-based level.

When analysing the 2013 national tests for year 9, one can immediately note that even though there was no mention in the syllabus for year 9 of "informed proposals on ethical-environmental choices and prioritisations in everyday life", which was explicitly stated for year 6, the constructors of the test have identified and assessed a capacity in year 9 referred to (as for year 6) as "The capacity to assess solutions to different environmental and developmental issues by means of deliberations around ethics and sustainable development" (author's own translation, Delprov B, År 9, Nat. prov i geografi 2013, p. 23). Four tasks are devoted to assessing this specific capacity. The tasks involve the following areas: (a) arguing for the building of windmills; (b) explaining the significance of clean water for children's health, living conditions and future; (c) clean water and its relation to the possibilities of development for a country; and (d) discussing ways of diminishing the threats and risks for the area where the river Ganges reaches the sea, to be carried out by using different perspectives such as individual-societal, local-global, and contemporary-future.

These choices of tasks clearly represent global responsibilities and ethical issues, and the pupils are asked to explain and argue in relation to these different problems, using their acquired knowledge and the rich information that is provided through maps, tables and short texts in the actual tests. However, as in the other tests for year 6, no tools are provided for an ethical stance, for example, ethical concepts, sentence starters or the like.

To summarise, when it comes to the school subject *geography*, the following picture can be noted: global responsibilities, particularly economic and social but also ecological aspects of sustainable development, are definitely present in the syllabus and assessed in the 2013 national test. These ethically laden issues are approached from a factual, explanatory point of view, and tools are not provided to assist in the forming of an ethical stance. This is in spite of the fact that the capacity to be tested here is meant to include ethical deliberation.

History is the second school subject to be reviewed here with regard to how global responsibilities and ethical aspects are dealt with in the syllabus and the national test. Perhaps history could be expected not to have so much to contribute to this kind of study of global responsibilities, but an analysis of the syllabus points in another direction. Starting with the overall aim, one thing that is pointed out is the importance of pupils developing an understanding of how women and men through the ages have shaped and changed societies and cultures. Under core content for years 4–6, meetings between cultures in light of archaeological findings are mentioned. European voyages of discovery are to be dealt with, as is, for example, trade between the Nordic and Baltic countries, to be understood as part of global exchange. Migration is also mentioned. For years 7–9, the emergence and development of ancient influential cultures in Africa, America and Asia are to be compared. World trade between Europe, Asia, Africa and America during the 1700–1900 is furthermore mentioned as part of the core content. Thereafter comes the period of European "dominance, imperialism and colonialism" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 167). Here it is also stated that narratives from different parts of the world, describing experiences of oppression and resistance to oppression, are to form part of the core content. In the study of the twentieth century, democratisation, the world wars, the cold war, the UN and contemporary international conflicts are to be part of the core content. In the knowledge requirements for pupils in year 6, there is a reference to the capacity to see developmental trends regarding cultural encounters, migration, politics and living conditions of people and connect them to the present. For pupils at the end of year 9, one thing explicitly mentioned as a knowledge requirement is the Holocaust and other examples of genocide. The requirement from year 6 regarding cultural encounters, migration, etc. is also repeated.

It is obvious from the description above that the school subject history, in its aim and the described core content, is a school subject that includes material that crosses the Swedish borders and brings in international perspectives on Sweden and Swedish history. It also includes histories of domination and subjugation and opens up space for narratives recounting experiences of those being subjugated. The knowledge requirements mention cultural encounters, migration, the Holocaust and genocide – truly questions that have ethical aspects. However, there is no explicit mentioning of ethics in relation to these issues. What was then tested in the national tests for history in 2013?

Starting with the test for year 6, the overall impression is that, to a large extent, in fact almost exclusively, it focuses on Sweden and living conditions in Sweden. One of the few "border-crossing" questions deals with the borders of Sweden after the inclusion of neighbouring countries after wars. However, the test for year 9 reflects more of an international/global content by bringing up, for example, the rights of women in France in the eighteenth century, industrialisation in Great Britain and colonialism. Slave trading, Hitler's seizing of power, the background to World War II, the Holocaust and contemporary right-wing extremism are also examples of the content of tasks. Other themes are children as workers during the nineteenth century in Sweden, voting rights of young people, the use of history in a speech by Olof Palme and the development of the Swedish welfare society. In sev-

eral tasks the adequate use of historical sources is tested, historical explanations are sought, and pupils are also asked to evaluate others' use of history. The examples in the test represent varied situations and are from different times and different, though mainly European, countries. Although several tasks give examples of value-laden situations where ethical aspects could have been highlighted, this does not take place. For example, in relation to the one task dealing with slave trading, where a text is quoted that expresses that slaves are commodities, not human beings – there a discussion of the equal value of all human beings, of human dignity, could have been introduced.

To summarise, the aim and core content of the school subject *history* underline international aspects of the school subject, like cultural encounters, migration and other international/global relationships. In the test for year 9, this is reflected, while in the test of year 6, it is reflected much less. The value-laden aspects of the subject are treated in such a way that the use of history, historical explanations, etc. are what is asked for – and a language which would allow for an ethical, principled discussion is not used, e.g. regarding the human dignity of slaves. The critical capacity to be developed is strictly connected to the evaluation of different historical sources and possible conclusions that may, or may not, be drawn from them.

Civics/social studies is the third school subject to be analysed regarding global responsibilities and ethical competence. In this school subject, according to the aims, issues regarding democracy and its societal processes and procedures have their place. An understanding of human rights and the living conditions of people is also what is to be developed. Gender equality is explicitly mentioned as being of importance, as is an understanding of how interests and opinions are formed and how different actors attempt to influence the development of society. When the capacities that pupils are to develop are described in the aim for the subject, it is stated that pupils are to be able to "analyse and critically examine local, national and global societal issues from different perspectives" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 189). It is also stated that pupils are to be able "to express and assess different standpoints in e.g. current societal issues and arguments based on facts, values and different perspectives" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 189) and that pupils are to learn to "reflect over human rights and democratic values, principles, ways of working and decision-making processes" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 190). Under core content for year 6, reference is made to, for example, economic conditions for children in Sweden and in the world, the rights of indigenous peoples like the Sami population, and human rights including the rights of children. For year 9, human rights, the UN and economic differences in terms of resources, power and influence are among the themes to be taken up. Although global issues are mentioned and clearly form part of the content, there is an overall emphasis on Swedish society in the syllabus of this subject. The word *ethical* appears once in the text under core content for the older pupils. This is in connection to democratic freedoms and legal rights where "[e]thical and democratic dilemmas linked to democratic rights and obligations" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 193) are to be part of the teaching.

What is then tested in the 2013 national tests in civics/social studies? In the test for year 6, there is a strong emphasis on basic understanding of the functioning of

democratic processes and the juridical system. Families, their financial situations and differences between those who are more well-off and those with fewer resources are also brought up. The tasks in the test vary: sometimes pupils are to connect a phenomenon with an explanation, or make choices between and use terms/notions in short texts, or discuss and explain matters such as those exemplified above. With one exception, the questions are set in a Swedish context. The exception is one task where the children are asked to discuss and give arguments in relation to what poverty depends on, poverty being described as still being a reality for many people around the world, as they do not have housing, electricity or running water.

Looking next at the test for year 9, the focus noted above on democracy and its functioning in societal structures may also be seen. Swedish society is still at the centre even though issues of migration to and from Sweden; conflicts in the world and their influence on other countries, for example, Sweden; and import and export to Sweden connect Sweden to the world beyond its borders. Matters of societal economy like taxes and their use are also a theme brought up over and over again. In the year 9 test, there are three tasks related to the UN and its functioning. Matters of human rights are not mentioned in the test. Gender equality is indirectly represented in one task with a table revealing salary differences between women and men and between people born outside of Sweden and those born in Sweden. Pupils are asked to discuss why the facts in this table are as they are as a follow-up task.

To summarise this analysis of *civics/social studies*, when looking at the tests compared to the aims, it is possible to note that certain issues such as human rights, the role of national minorities and the living conditions of people in the world are either not brought up at all or just brought up briefly. The answer to this is given in the document (Bedömningsanvisningar, Ämnesprov Samhällskunskap, år 9, 2013: 4)[9] that accompanies the test. There it is stated that the test of 2013 tested only three of the six knowledge demands for civics/social studies. The three dealing with (a) human rights and national minorities, (b) how individuals and societies impact on one another and (c) a critical capacity vis-à-vis the use of different sources in information seeking are not tested in 2013. The significance of this here, for the question of global responsibility, is that those issues were not tested to their full in this particular version of the national test, but this can be expected to take place in other years. Just a minor observation though, it seems as if the word global is absent where it could have been present, for example, in the formulation of knowledge demands related to the test. Otherwise, the overall impression from the way that both tests of 2013 were constructed is that there is a focus on processes, structures and facts, and when the values of democracy are to be evaluated, fairly value-free, fact-based arguments seem to be what are expected as answers. The word ethical in the formulation of the core content of the teaching for pupils years 7–9, reading "[e]thical and democratic dilemmas linked to democratic rights and obligations" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 193), is not transferred to the knowledge demands to be tested, nor do ethical concepts appear in the tests.

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[9]Available   at   http://ips.gu.se/forskning/forskningsprojekt/nationella-prov-samhallskunskap/hamta-prov/ (Retrieved 2015-04-10).

Leaving the social sciences school subjects and going into the area of the *natural sciences*, and doing this even more briefly for the sake of saving space, the issues of sustainable development are the ones connected to the issues of global responsibility that are treated there. Looking at the syllabuses for *biology*, *physics* and *chemistry*, the concept sustainable development may be seen in all three of them. It is, for all of them, mentioned in the overall description of the subject as something studies of biology, physics and chemistry are to contribute to. For biology and chemistry, it appears also, mentioned briefly once, as one aspect of the core content of the subject. It is also, for all three subjects, mentioned once among the knowledge requirements. But for none of these subjects is sustainable development a main theme in terms of core content, as it is for geography. With regard to the use of the word *ethical*, it appears once, and in the same way, in the syllabuses for these three subjects. It appears under the aim of the subject when the use of the knowledge pupils are to acquire is described. The knowledge pupils gain should give them the opportunity to express their own arguments and review those of others, and "As a result, pupils should be given the preconditions to manage practical, *ethical* and aesthetic situations involving health, use of natural resources and ecological sustainability" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 105) (example from biology, author's italics). What is expressed here is that the knowledge gained is to assist in the solving of "ethical" problems. Additionally, the word ethical appears once more in the syllabus for biology where it is connected to genetics.

What is then tested in the national tests? Focusing on the tests for year 9 (and leaving those for year 6 aside), each of the three tests has one task that is clearly related to sustainable development. Matters of biology, physics and chemistry are related to societal consequences and political priorities, and pupils are to argue for a certain kind of food production, energy production or the packaging of a certain product – taking into consideration environmental aspects in biology, physics and chemistry. In these pedagogically well-thought-through tasks, the pupils were provided with various kinds of facts on the basis of which they were to form their argument. The facts were based on biology, physics and chemistry, respectively. The tasks also had Swedish society as their context. In biology, as might be expected, knowledge of ecological relationships also formed part of what was tested, for example, in the context of the Baltic Sea.

To summarise, generally when the issues of sustainable development are tested in year 9 in the *natural sciences*, they are approached based on the facts that the discipline in question provides. In the syllabuses, the same disciplinary perspective prevails: knowledge in these subjects contributes to sustainable development. Pupils are to be able to think critically about "their own results, the arguments of others and different sources of information" (Lgr11[eng] 2011: 105;135;120).

6.4.2   Summary

Looking at what and how global issues are expressed in the school subjects of the social and natural sciences reveals a great variation between what is brought up and how this is done, both in the syllabuses and in the tests analysed here. Quite a number of issues need to be brought up if the syllabuses are to be followed, and Swedish pupils are to have the chance of becoming reasonably well-informed citizens of the world. However, certain imbalances can be noted: matters related to sustainable development are quite well covered in the syllabuses, human rights less so, and democracy issues that are not closely connected to the Swedish situation are almost completely neglected. There is a variation in how consistent the tests are with the syllabuses, with regard to global issues, and it can of course be argued that what was not tested in 2013 might have been tested in another year. It is not possible to follow up on this, as the tests for subsequent years are not public. However, the framing of the tasks can always be discussed, and here my impression is that the test in geography stands out with regard to the way that it framed the tasks. This relates primarily to the positioning of the problems in a worldwide context, but also the integrated use of data, drawings and tables to construct a challenging and rich learning environment. How much that can be argued to depend on the disciplinary setting of this particular subject is hard to formulate any precise opinion on.

One additional and particularly striking observation is that within each of these subjects, when dealing with the issues of global responsibility and the testing of them, it is the knowledge dimensions of that particular subject that are relied upon in explaining and solving the questions. No resources from ethical reasoning or ethical theory were needed. Pupils were not asked to take an ethical stance.

6.5   Results and Concluding Discussion

6.5.1   Results

Bringing the results of this chapter together, we can note that the introductory part of the Swedish curriculum places an emphasis on issues of global responsibility. Furthermore, ethical competence has a central position. Three dimensions or capacities included in it have been identified. Pupils are to be able to:

- *Consciously formulate and express an ethical stance based on knowledge where the values of democracy and human rights as well as personal experience are of vital importance.*
- *Empathise with other persons and their situations and prepare for action with the well-being of others in focus.*
- *Express critical thinking and independence vis-à-vis others in the formulation of the stance.*

Two criteria for this competence as well as an area of special concern were also found. The criteria are *the respect for the intrinsic value of all human beings* and *resistance to oppression and degrading treatment of people.* The area of special concern with regard to developing an ethical stance is *the environment nearby and from a broader perspective*.

When this tentative definition with criteria and an area of special concern was used as an evaluating point of reference for the syllabus and national test of 2013 in religious education, where ethics education is to have its place, it was noted above that both the syllabus and in particular the test had a narrower focus, in regard to both ethical competence and its relationship with issues characteristic of global responsibility. An argumentative understanding of ethical competence focusing on concepts and a model for a meta-theoretical characterisation of theories were central in the test. But no explicit reference to democratic values, nor to the dignity/ value or rights of all human beings was made, nor were environmental aspects brought in when ethical competence was tested.

Given these results, in the next stage, the presence of global issues in syllabuses and national tests of other school subjects was analysed. It was noted that global issues have a central place in geography, are present in history but are not present to the same extent in civics/social studies. In the natural science subjects, the knowledge of these subjects as disciplines is understood as contributing towards sustainable development. However, in all these subjects when complex and value-laden issues and problems were brought up in the tests, what was asked for was explanations or reasoning based on the facts provided by the discipline. Even though matters might be described as ethical-environmental in syllabuses, ethics was not explicitly introduced as a tool in the solution of tasks.

6.5.2   Concluding Discussion

The results show that the broad understanding of ethical competence from the initial part of the curriculum, where it is "clothed" in a context relating to human rights and democratic values, and where important aspects foundational for global responsibility are present, is narrowed down to a focus on an almost exclusively argumentative capacity in the test, and much of the value context is lost in the syllabus for religious education. This process seems to mirror the methodological discussion within ethical theory of the local and universal or a discussion of contextualisation and ethics (see Sporre 2015a, b). The more "naked" or "stripped" understanding of ethics in the syllabus and tests for RE could then be understood to represent a universalising, principled understanding of ethics, whereas the understanding from the initial part of the curriculum could be said to represent a contextualised one where ethics and values mutually shape and provide content for one another. Drawing such a far-reaching conclusion may not seem totally fair, as after all the material in terms of tasks in the national tests of 2013 was quite limited, but there is still the feeling

that the examples, except for the task of forgiveness, have not really been "earthed" into living realities and definitely not realities representing global responsibilities.

The fact that other school subjects do take up global issues but treat them from their academic, disciplinary-knowledge point of view – and not as ethical problems – is interesting to note. In contrast, the introductory part of the curriculum emphasises the importance of taking an ethical stance where values and knowledge are integrated. How a deepened understanding and integration into these subjects of ethical competence is to come about is also, I want to argue, both a question of interdisciplinary development of practices and development of policy, if syllabuses are to be consistent with the first part of the curriculum.

A beginning to an answer to the overall question, mirrored in the title of this chapter, of how global responsibilities are to be assessed as aspects of ethics education, is to note that this has not been done in the Swedish national tests of 2013. *Global* responsibilities were not tested in RE, and global *responsibilities* were not tested in any other school subjects (as a result of the understanding that the word responsibility carries an ethical dimension). To move on in responding to the question, if global responsibilities were to be assessed, the first step in such a direction would have to be a twofold change having to do both with ethics education and other school subjects. Firstly, the understanding of ethics education needs to be more oriented towards letting it be "clothed" in values like democratic values, but also letting it take place in the context of human rights and global situations, and be less "technically argumentative". Secondly, such a twofold change would demand that other school subjects, in their treatment of global issues, would need to see and recognise implied values in seemingly factual arguments and regard the involvement of ethical concepts and principles as an additional resource in the forming of a conscious ethical stance in relation to global issues. This in turn has implications, I would say, for syllabuses but also most certainly for teacher education.

Continuing the discussion of assessment of global responsibility or ethics education more generally, one reflection in relation to the construction of tasks and the space for ethics education within the school subject of RE is that given the importance assigned to the forming of conscious ethical standpoints in the initial part of the curriculum, the need for knowledge in this area seems greater than the actual space given in the syllabus and the national test for RE. A concrete remark in relation to the test discussed here is that fairly few tasks were given that tested ethical competence. Were the test to assess capacities as indicated in the tentative definition formulated here, more tasks would be needed. Tasks could also be "spread" into other school subjects if ethical perspectives were to be integrated into them.

Another issue raised in the introductory part of this chapter concerned a well-known discussion within the field of education and sustainable development (see Jickling 1994; Kopnina 2014). That discussion relates to how the autonomy of pupils is preserved or not when normative or value-laden issues are touched upon in education. This is a crucial discussion to monitor, not least in a compulsory school such as the Swedish school for years 1–9. To lay bare the complexities in terms of knowledge, to see clearly how facts and values form part of an argument, is then of

importance – and there ethics education can make a contribution. This, however, requires the development of cooperation between school subjects and interdisciplinary work.

The discussion above of the assessment of global responsibilities, and the failure to give appropriate emphasis to global responsibilities in syllabuses and tests, has in itself pointed to directions in which to move to change this situation. More tasks in tests, and integration between school subjects in terms of teaching practice, syllabuses and tests, are required, using the broad understanding of ethical competence from the initial part of the curriculum as a possible guide. Still however, the task is complicated; to navigate and find the balance between ethical reasoning, facts, experiences, values and emotions is a delicate endeavour. This is what education is about.

Finally, this chapter has, in addition to studying global responsibilities and ethical competence in relation to ethics education, also as a result, given a tentative definition of three capacities that form part of ethical competence. This can be seen as a contribution to further research, as something to be critically examined and developed.

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Chapter 7
Differential Item Functioning in the National Tests in Religious Education in Sweden

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Abstract The Mantel-Haenszel method is used to investigate whether there are items in the national tests in religious education from 2013 exhibiting differential item functioning (DIF) between groups of students. DIF in an item means that the item functions differently between two groups, after adjusting for the two groups' overall abilities. Two comparisons are made: between boys and girls and between native speakers and pupils with Swedish as their second language. The results of the analysis lead, for example, to the speculation that closed format items exhibiting DIF are more likely to favour boys than girls and the reverse speculation holds for items of open format. Having data from only two tests, these speculations need to be investigated further with data from later tests.

In addition to the DIF analysis, some descriptive statistics concerning the pupils' results on the tests are presented, in particular the results on the items relating to ethics.

7.1   Introduction

The national tests in religious education in the 6th and 9th grades were conducted for the first time in their current form in May and April 2013. In this chapter, I will investigate a particular statistical aspect of these tests, in particular the ethics items on the tests, namely, that of *differential item functioning* (DIF). In other words, I will take a look at what items (if any) seem to favour certain groups of students. But before explaining the concept of differential item functioning in more detail, I will describe the tests and the data we have from the tests.

Both tests were in two parts given on two separate days: for the 6th grade, the tests were given on the 2nd and 3rd of May, and for the 9th grade, the tests were given on the 16th and 17th of April. Teachers were then asked to submit results electronically for students born on the 6th, 16th and 26th of each month for students

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taking the 6th grade test (RE6) and on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month for students taking the 9th grade test (RE9). It should be mentioned that this way of reporting scores was mandatory. In this way, for RE6 a data set consisting of the score on each item of the test for 1510 students was obtained. After the deletion of 24 incomplete entries and 43 further entries corresponding to students not born on the above-mentioned dates, 1443 entries remained. The analysis in this chapter has been carried out on those 1443 entries. For the RE9 test, the scores for 1701 students were reported, of which 27 incomplete entries and 15 further entries corresponding to students not born on the above-indicated dates were deleted, leaving 1659 entries. Both data sets also contain information about gender and which students have Swedish as their second language. From now on, students with Swedish as their second language will be called SvA students. Some descriptive statistics of the samples are presented in Sect. 7.2.

The purpose of the tests is not only to measure the pupils' knowledge about various religions. In fact, the items in the RE9 test are categorised into three different groups, which can somewhat informally be described as follows: one group of items is about analysing Christianity and other religions, another group requires the pupils to reason and argue about moral questions using ethical models, and the final group of items is about seeking and analysing information about religions.

The RE9 test consists of 29 items and the RE6 test consists of 30 items. The maximum attainable score on the RE6 is 54 and the maximum score on the RE9 test is 47. On the RE9 test, there are three items that relate to ethics and on the RE6 test there are four such items. There are different formats of items: some are open and some are closed. Many, but not all, of the closed items are multiple choice. There are also many polytomous items (items with more than two score levels) that are worth a maximum of 2 or 3 points. An important feature of both tests is that a pupil's grade is not calculated directly from the total sum-score. Various other conditions must also be met to obtain a specific grade. For example, to obtain grade D or higher on the RE9 test, it is necessary to obtain a non-zero score on each of the three categories of items mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The tests from 2013, and the full details about how grades are calculated, are available online in Swedish at Skolverket (2013a, b). Tests from later years are currently not available due to confidentiality, but they might be released in the future. In this chapter, the items are named A:X or B:X where A or B indicates that the item belongs to part A or B of the test and X indicates the number of the item.

From here on, differential item functioning will be abbreviated as DIF. Here, I give an intuitive description of the concept of DIF, before giving a more precise definition in Sect. 7.3.

Since the girls perform better on average than the boys on the RE9 test (see Table 7.2), it is natural to expect that on most of the items in the test, the girls would perform better. However, there might exist items that display uncharacteristically large or small differences between the groups, meaning that the item functions differently for the groups. As an example of an item that might be suspected of being a DIF item, one can look at item A:8 from the RE9 test in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Mean solution frequencies for males and females on item A:8 on the RE9 test. The item might be suspected of having DIF

	Mean solution frequency
Males	0.69
Females	0.62

Here, the mean solution frequency is defined as the total number of points obtained by all students on the item, divided by the maximum total number of points all students could achieve. On this task, mean solution frequency for the boys is higher than that for the girls, even though the girls perform better on average on the whole test (see Table 7.2). Hence, this task seems to function differently for the two genders. An item displaying differences of a significantly unexpected nature between a focus group and a reference group is said to display differential functioning between the groups. To determine which items seem to exhibit DIF of practical significance, I will use the popular Mantel-Haenszel method, together with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) classification system. I will describe the Mantel-Haenszel method in some detail in Sect. 7.3.

When looking for DIF in an item, one compares how the item functions between a focus group and a reference group. I will make two comparisons: between boys and girls and between native speakers and students that have Swedish as their second language. However, I would like to mention at this point that the size of the SvA group in our data sets is rather small, smaller than recommended by the ETS (Zwick 2012). Hence, these results should be interpreted with care. This will be discussed further in the results section.

It is of interest for various reasons to investigate whether items in a test exhibit DIF. As noted in, for example, Meyer (2014), if an item shows DIF, this might indicate that the item is measuring something that the test is not intended for. This means that the item could possibly present a threat to the validity of the test. For some types of tests, if the DIF in an item is too severe, one might consider not using the item in later tests. In the case of national tests in RE in Sweden, most items will probably not be reused in an identical form in later tests. However, one thing a test constructor might want to avoid is using many items of a type that seems to favour the same group.

Since this study is based on data from only two tests, it will not be possible to draw far-reaching conclusions about which types of items favour different groups. Moreover, these two tests are for different age categories of students. However, I will give examples of items that seem to exhibit DIF, and hopefully this might be useful in the conducting of future studies with more data. I am not aware of any other study of DIF in national tests in religion in Sweden. However, DIF in the central tests in physics (Ramstedt 1996) has been studied, and I will discuss this in more detail in Sect. 7.3.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. Before the DIF investigation in Sect. 7.3, some descriptive statistics of the data sets are presented in Sect. 7.2. In Sects. 7.4 and 7.5, the results of the DIF analyses are presented. The chapter is supposed to be accessible to an audience without any statistical or mathematical background.

However, for completeness, I have chosen to describe the method used, in Sect. 7.3. The reader who is not interested in the technical details can probably skip some of that section.

7.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Data Sets

In this section I present some basic descriptive statistics of the data sets. The following tables (Tables 7.2 and 7.3) summarise the mean and standard deviations of the scores, for all examinees and also for different groups corresponding to gender and language, where SvA stands for Swedish as second language.

The next two tables (Tables 7.4 and 7.5) show the mean solution frequency for the ethics items and other items.

As can be seen from Tables 7.4 and 7.5 in both tests, the ethics items seem to have been slightly more difficult compared to the rest of the tests. However, this does certainly not imply that this part of the subject in general is more difficult than

Table 7.2 Descriptive statistics on the RE9 test

	Number of examinees	Mean score	Standard deviation
All examinees	1659	23.12	8.095
Girls	825	25.00	8.310
Boys	834	21.27	7.429
Native speakers	1550	23.28	8.073
SvA	109	20.95	8.127

Table 7.3 Descriptive statistics on the RE6 test

	Number of examinees	Mean score	Standard deviation
All examinees	1443	27.15	9.482
Girls	698	29.31	9.292
Boys	745	25.13	9.214
Native speakers	1269	27.77	9.340
SvA	174	22.68	9.329

Table 7.4 Comparing solution frequencies for ethics items and other items on the RE9 test. The last row is a 95 % confidence interval for the difference between the mean solution frequency for ethics items and other items, calculated using paired samples

	Mean solution frequency
Ethics items	0.454
Other items	0.499
95 % CI for the difference	$[-0.054, -0.036]$

Table 7.5 Comparing solution frequencies for the ethics items and other items on the RE6 test. The last row is a 95 % confidence interval for the difference between the mean solution frequency for ethics items and other items, calculated using paired samples

	Mean solution frequency
Ethics items	0.476
Other items	0.510
95 % CI for the difference	$[-0.043, -0.026]$

Table 7.6 Distribution of grades (in percentages) for all examinees and for the sample, RE6

Grade	Frequency in whole population (23,520 students)	Frequency in sample
A	2.5	2.4
B	7.5	6.7
C	12.3	10.9
D	25.0	26.3
E	40.5	41.2
F	12.3	12.5

Data from Skolverket (2013)

Table 7.7 Distribution of grades (in percentages) for all examinees and for the sample, RE9

Grade	Frequency in whole population (23,696 students)	Frequency in sample
A	3.3	3.3
B	8.6	8.6
C	23.8	18.7
D	13.5	13.4
E	38.6	42.1
F	12.3	14.0

Data from Skolverket (2013)

the rest; one could easily construct easier ethics items (but of course, making them too easy might render them purposeless).

To compare our samples with the whole population, we consider the distributions of the grades (Tables 7.6 and 7.7).

As can be seen above, the distribution of grades on the RE9 test is not unimodal (doesn't have a single maximum). This is partially explained by the fact that the grades are not determined only by the total number of points the pupil obtains but also by how these points are distributed over the test.

7.3   Differential Item Functioning in the Tests

There are various ways to identify items with DIF. In this chapter, we will describe and then use the so-called Mantel-Haenszel method (Haenszel and Mantel 1959). Actually, this method works only for dichotomous items (items with two score levels). For polytomous items, an extension of the Mantel-Haenszel method, due to Mantel (1963), will be employed. The Mantel-Haenszel method was popularised for the study of DIF in Holland and Thayer (1988) (see also Holland and Wainer 1993). Other methods used for detecting DIF include methods based on item response theory (IRT); see Hambleton et al. (1991). However, if one wants to use methods based on IRT, one would first have to check that certain model assumptions are met. In this study, I prefer to avoid that. I also describe how to measure the amount of DIF, and the system used by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for the classification of DIF.

Somewhat informally,

> *An item is said to exhibit DIF between two groups of students if there is some level of ability, such that the distribution of scores on the item is different for students from one group than for students from the other group at this level of ability.*

By 'ability', I here mean the proficiency that the test is supposed to measure. Beforehand, the abilities of the students are not known, so they have to be estimated from the test.

I will now briefly describe the Mantel-Haenszel method for detecting DIF in an item with two score levels, 0 and 1. The polytomous case is slightly more involved, and the reader is referred to Meyer (2014) for details. In the description of the method, I use the group female as the focal group and male as the reference group. The goal is to compare the performance of members of the focal and reference groups who have comparable skills. To do this, examinees are stratified according to a *matching score*. This matching score can be taken to be the total test score. Hence, two examinees with the same total test score are considered to have similar skills. Using the total test score as the matching score is the simplest method, but not always the best. For smaller samples, it might be better to use a matching score that creates larger strata, for example, the test grade. Here, I will not discuss in detail the pros and cons of various matching scores, but the reader is directed to Ramstedt (1996) or Meyer (2014) for discussions on this topic.

After performing the stratification, the data is presented in *2 × 2 contingency tables*, with one table for each stratum. The following is an example of one of these tables.

In Table 7.8, n_{s21} stands for the number of females with a total test score of j who scored 0 on the item; $n_{s1.}$ stands for the total number of male examinees with test score j, and $n_{s.1}$ stands for the total number of examinees with total test score j who scored 0 on the item.

Let p_j denote the probability that a girl with total test score j answers the item correctly, and let q_j denote the probability that a boy with total test score j answers the item correctly. Then the statement that the item does not have any DIF can formally be stated as

Table 7.8 Contingency table for stratum number j for a dichotomous item

	Item score 0	Item score 1	Total
Male	n_{s11}	n_{s12}	$n_{s1\cdot}$
Female	n_{s21}	n_{s22}	$n_{s2\cdot}$
Total	$n_{s\cdot1}$	$n_{s\cdot2}$	$n_{s\cdot\cdot}$

$$p_j = q_j \text{ for all } j$$

To investigate if the item seems to exhibit DIF, one considers the Mantel-Haenszel test statistic:

$$\chi^2_{MH} = \frac{\left(\sum_{s=1}^{K} \left(n_{s11} - \frac{n_{s\cdot1}n_{s1\cdot}}{n_{s\cdot\cdot}} \right) \right)^2}{\sum_{s=1}^{K} \frac{n_{s\cdot1}n_{s1\cdot}n_{s\cdot2}n_{s2\cdot}}{n_{s\cdot\cdot}^2(n_{s\cdot\cdot}-1)}}$$

Here, K stands for the number of strata, which is the same as the maximum score on the test plus one if we use the total test score as the matching score. If the item does not have any DIF and provided that the sample is large enough, the Mantel-Haenszel statistic is approximately chi-square distributed with one degree of freedom (Haenszel and Mantel 1959); see also Agresti (2013). If the observed value of χ^2_{MH} is uncharacteristically large, the item is flagged for DIF. The probability that a chi-square-distributed random variable with one degree of freedom is greater than 3.841 is 0.05, and the probability that it is larger than 6.635 is 0.01. Thus, if χ^2_{MH} is larger than 3.841 or larger than 6.635, the item is flagged for DIF at a significance level of 0.05 and 0.01, respectively. For a polytomous item, a similar but somewhat more complicated test statistic is calculated; see, for example, Mantel (1963).

The Mantel-Haenszel method has been employed in analyses of Swedish national tests before. In a doctoral thesis by Ramstedt (1996), the central tests in physics in Sweden between 1982 and 1994 were investigated. (This particular type of nation-wide test was discontinued in 1996.) Johansson (2013) used the method to investigate aspects of the national tests in mathematics. Ramstedt found that items concerning electricity seemed to favour girls. On the other hand, items concerning mechanics seemed to favour boys. He observed that the finding that electricity items favoured girls seemed to contradict what was then a common belief that these types of items favoured boys instead. Another of Ramstedt's findings was that items that contained a spatial component (e.g. a geometric figure) seemed to favour boys. Differential item functioning has also been studied in national tests in other countries. For example, in Gnaldi (2015) aspects of DIF in the national tests in Italian and mathematics in Italy were considered.

If the sample is large, very small and practically insignificant amounts of DIF will also be detected. Thus, given a sufficiently large sample, it is likely that most items would be flagged for DIF at some reasonable level of significance. Therefore,

it is of interest to not only flag items for DIF but also to quantify it. For dichotomous items, the Mantel-Haenszel estimator of the common odds ratio is used:

$$\hat{\theta}_{MH} = \frac{\sum_{s=1}^{K}(n_{s12}n_{s21}/n_{s..})}{\sum_{s=1}^{K}(n_{s11}n_{s22}/n_{s..})}$$

If the item is free of or only has a small amount of DIF and the sample is large, then $\hat{\theta}_{MH}^{2}$ will typically be close to 1. It is common to transform $\hat{\theta}_{MH}^{2}$ into something that is symmetric around 0, by letting

$$\Delta_{MH} = -2.35\ln(\hat{\theta}_{MH})$$

The quantity Δ_{MH} is called the ETS delta statistic. If the item has no DIF, then Δ_{MH} is typically close to 0. Negative values of Δ_{MH} indicate that the item favours the reference group (meaning boys in this example), while positive values of Δ_{MH} indicate that the item favours the focal group (girls).

To quantify the amount of DIF in polytomous items, the standardised mean difference is used (see, e.g. Meyer (2014) for the explicit formula.) From now on, both Δ_{MH} and the standardised mean difference will be referred to as effect size (ES).

In order to determine the severity of DIF in a dichotomous item, the following categories used by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) can be used (Meyer 2014). For dichotomous items, category A stands for no DIF or a small amount of DIF, B stands for a moderate amount of DIF, and C stands for a large amount of DIF. In the classification, not only Δ_{MH} (which is a point estimate of the true effect size) but also a 95 % confidence interval for the effect size is used. The categories are as follows:

(A) *An item is classified as an A item if* χ_{MH}^{2} *is less than 3.84 or if* $|\Delta_{MH}| < 1$.
(B) *An item is classified as a B item if it is not an A item or a C item.*
(C) *An item is classified as a C item if one of the following things happens: (a)* Δ_{MH} *is less than* -1.5 *and the upper bound for the 95 % confidence interval for the effect size is less than* -1, *or (b)* Δ_{MH} *is larger than 1.5 and the lower bound for the 95 % confidence interval for the effect size is larger than 1.*

An A item does not have much DIF; in other words, it functions in approximately the same way for the reference and focal group. If there is a + sign after the B or C, then the item favours the focal group. For example, if the focal group is female, then a C+ item appears to be easier for girls than for boys at the same ability level. On the other hand, if there is a minus sign after the B or C, then the item seems to favour the reference group.

The corresponding classification rules for DIF in polytomous items are found, for example, in Meyer (2014). For polytomous items one uses AA, BB and CC (instead of A, B and C) as labels for the categories.

I will also study DIF between the groups native speakers and SvA. In this study, the SvA group is taken to be the focal group. However, it should be mentioned at this point that the group sizes for the SvA groups are smaller than what is recommended for the study of DIF. A smaller sample size means, for example, that the method has a lower detection rate of items with severe DIF (category C).

When comparing the genders, it is a priori not quite clear on what types of tasks to expect DIF in a test in religion. We do not have any detailed information about the backgrounds of the pupils in the SvA group. This makes it difficult to guess what items will be DIF items in this study. However, one can guess that students in the SvA group on average come from cultures where religion plays a larger role than for students in the non-SvA group. As will be seen in the result section, some items about Islam seem to favour the SvA group.

An item in an RE test flagged as a B/BB or C/CC item should probably not be considered a bad item for that reason alone. A review of the item should be conducted to investigate if the item is unsuitable and to clarify why the item has DIF. In addition, there is always a chance that an item is falsely flagged as B/BB or C/CC (a type I error). See Zwick (2012) for a discussion on the type I error rate for this method in some different situations.

Even though we put most of the focus on the ethics items in this book, I have checked all the items in the tests for DIF. This was done in order to examine what types of items, if any, exhibit DIF. For example, if DIF is detected in an ethics item, the DIF could possibly be explained by the fact that the item requires good writing or reading ability or maybe by the format of the item, rather than the fact that it is an ethics item.

In the next section, I present the results of the DIF analysis for the items relating to ethics and also for those items in the other parts of the tests that displayed the greatest amount of DIF. The calculations have been done in the software jMetrik (Meyer 2014).

7.4   Results of the DIF Analysis for RE6

The DIF analysis with respect to gender of the RE6 test shows that the test seems to be quite gender neutral. Only two items are flagged for moderate DIF, one in favour of boys and one in favour of girls. The other items are classified as A or AA items. The tables below show the items relating to ethics in the test (in bold) and the items flagged for moderate DIF. The full DIF analysis is found in the appendix (Table 7.9).

Item A:3 is an ethics item and it is flagged for moderate DIF in favour of girls. This item is an open item. It concerns an ethical dilemma in which a girl faces the question of whether she should tell her friend that she smells of sweat or not. The student answering the item is required to include words such as *responsibility*, *right*, *wrong* and *fair*.

Table 7.9 Results of the DIF analysis with respect to gender for RE6. Presented in the table are those items flagged with moderate to severe DIF and all ethics items in the test

Item	χ^2_{MH}	p-value	95 % CI for effect size	ETS classification
A:3	33.26	0.00**	(0.12, 0.27)	BB+
A:9	1.97	0.16	(−0.03, 0.13)	AA
A:10	4.14	0.04	(0.01, 0.19)	AA
B:13	20.26	0.00**	(0.06, 0.21)	AA
B:16	17.64	0.00**	(−1.83, −0.16)	B−

A p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

Table 7.10 Results of the DIF analysis with respect to SvA for RE6. Presented in the table are those items flagged with severe DIF and all ethics items in the test

Item	χ^2_{MH}	p-value	95 % CI for ES	ETS classification
A:3	0.00	0.97	(−0.11,0.10)	AA
A:9	10.77	0.00**	(−0.32, −0.08)	BB−
A:10	4.32	0.04	(−0.24, −0.01)	AA
B:13	4.16	0.04	(−0.21, −0.00)	AA
A:1e	45.08	0.00**	(2.07, 3.86)	C+
A:2	36.25	0.00**	(0.24, 0.46)	CC+
B:15	22.58	0.00**	(−0.31, −0.13)	CC−

A p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

Item B:16 is also an open item. It is flagged for moderate DIF in favour of boys. In this item, the student is asked to write about religious reasons to open vegetarian restaurants in India.

If we look at DIF with respect to SvA instead, we see that three items are flagged for severe DIF. Item A:1e is a closed item formulated as 'Why is Ramadan celebrated?'. Item A:2 requires the student to choose two of the five largest religions and then describe the differences and similarities between the buildings used for worship in those two religions.

Both A:1e and A:2 are flagged for DIF in favour of the SvA group. The last item flagged for severe DIF is a task where the student is required to fit various religious words into an incomplete text (Table 7.10).

In the two next tables, we count the number of closed and open items with moderate to severe DIF (Tables 7.11 and 7.12).

Table 7.11 Format of DIF items (with respect to gender) in the RE6 test

	Open format	Closed
Total	2	0
Favouring F	1	0
Favouring M	1	0

Table 7.12 Format of DIF items (with respect to SvA) in the RE6 test

	Open format	Closed
Total	5	7
Favouring SvA	3	2
Favouring native speakers	2	5

Table 7.13 Results of the DIF analysis with respect to gender for RE9. The table shows the ethics items and those items flagged for moderate to severe DIF

	χ^2_{MH}	p-value	95 % CI for ES	ETS classification
A:12	82.64	0.00**	(0.21, 0.34)	BB+
B:24	3.85	0.05	(−1.11, −0.00)	A
B:25	3.17	0.08	(−0.02, 0.14)	AA
A:2	16.52	0.00**	(−1.71, −0.59)	B−
A:7	22.96	0.00**	(−1.76, −0.73)	B−
A:8	49.78	0.00**	(−2.48, −1.39)	C−
B:20	20.6	0.00**	(0.05, 0.17)	BB+
B:22	24.56	0.00**	(−0.23, −0.09)	BB−
B:23b	32.01	0.00**	(0.12, 0.24)	BB+

A p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

7.5 Results of the DIF Analysis of RE9

Compared to the RE6 test, the RE9 test contains more items flagged for DIF with respect to gender. Items A:2, A:7, A:8 and B:22 are all closed items. Hence, all items flagged for DIF in the test that favour boys are closed. The only item flagged for severe DIF is A:8: 'How did, according to the Bible, God give human beings the ten commandments?'. It seems somewhat unclear why this item should favour boys. The two items that are flagged for DIF in favour of girls are both of open format. Item A:12 is an ethics item requiring the student to discuss why forgiveness can be important both for the person asking for forgiveness and for the person asked to forgive (Table 7.13).

Three items are flagged for severe DIF with respect to SvA in the RE9 test. Item A:3 is a multiple-choice item, and the question is: 'In Islam, Jesus is considered to be…'. Item A:7 is also multiple choice: 'Which of the following holy texts is a

Table 7.14 Results of the DIF analysis with respect to SvA for RE9. The table displays the ethics items in the test and those items flagged for severe DIF

Item	χ^2_{MH}	p-value	95 % CI for ES	ETS classification
A:12	3.23	0.07	(−0.24, 0.01)	AA
B:24	5.47	0.02	(1.09, 2.61)	B−
B:25	9.79	0.00*	(−0.33, −0.07)	BB−
A:3	18.46	0.00**	(1.30, 3.80)	C+
A:7	26.9	0.00**	(1.66, 3.91)	C+
B:17	15.63	0.00**	(0.10, 0.30)	CC+
B:20	14.95	0.00**	(−0.33, −0.11)	CC−

A p-value less than 0.005 is indicated by * and a p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

Table 7.15 Format of DIF items (with respect to gender) in the RE9 test

	Open format	Closed
Total	3	4
Favouring F	3	0
Favouring M	0	4

Table 7.16 Format of DIF items (with respect to SvA) in the RE9 test

	Open format	Closed
Total	5	6
Favouring SvA	1	5
Favouring native speakers	4	1

Hindu text?'. This question is not about Islam, but two of the three false alternatives presented are Islamic texts. Item B:17 requires the student to determine whether several statements about Islam are true or false. Finally, item B:20 is of open format, requiring the student to first read three texts about the Plymouth Brethren and then to analyse some differences between the three texts. This item seems to favour the non-SvA group (Table 7.14).

The following tables summarise the number of items flagged with moderate to severe DIF according to the formats of the items (Tables 7.15 and 7.16).

7.6 Discussion

First, with regard to the ethics items in the tests, they do not show any severe DIF effect. It would be interesting to follow this up using data from later tests.

When it comes to DIF with respect to gender, the analysis of the RE9 test exhibits an interesting pattern: the three items with DIF in favour of girls are of open

format, while the four items with DIF in favour of boys are of closed format. On the RE6 test, both the item exhibiting DIF in favour of girls and the item exhibiting DIF in favour of boys are of open format. This leads to the guess that open items (as formulated by the constructors of the Swedish national tests in religious education) exhibiting DIF are more likely to favour girls than boys and the reverse guess holds for closed items. However, this guess is based on data from only two tests, so it is a rather vague speculation. Looking at the items, it is difficult to see any pattern regarding their content.

The result that closed format items seem to favour boys and open format items seem to favour girls has also been observed in other subjects internationally. For example, this was a conclusion in a study of tests in reading and mathematics in Taylor and Lee (2012). For a further discussion concerning gender and item formats in tests, see Chap. 8 in this book.

Concerning the DIF analysis with respect to SvA, it seems that items concerning Islam favour the SvA group to some extent. Indeed, of the five items favouring the SvA group in the RE6 test, three (A:1E, B:17 and B:18) have a clear Islamic content, while none of the items with DIF in favour of the non-SvA group do. On the RE9 test, two of the six items flagged with DIF in favour of the SvA group are about Islam (A:3 and B:17), while none of the items flagged with DIF in favour of the non-SvA group are. This leads to the speculation that items about Islam are more likely to have DIF in favour of SvA than in favour of the non-SvA group.

On the other hand, from Table 7.14 (for RE9), it is tempting to make the same speculation about DIF with respect to SvA in open and closed items as we did above for DIF with respect to gender. However, Table 7.12 (for RE6) does not support this speculation. But again, the two tests are for different age categories of students. Hence, it seems rather unclear what to think about closed and open items when it comes to DIF with respect to SvA.

As already mentioned above, the group size for SvA in this study is below the recommended size. It is also worth mentioning that the composition of the SvA group might change over time, making it difficult to verify findings in later tests.

Is there any reason to exclude the items in these two tests categorised as C items in future tests (or items similar to them)? Do they pose a threat to the validity of the tests? I do not think that this is the case. It seems to me that all of them are appropriate to a test in religious education, although this question might deserve some more attention. But, as already mentioned, the test constructors might want to be cautious about including many items of types that exhibit DIF.

Finally, I think that the DIF analysis presented here suggests some future directions of research: It would be of interest to conduct further investigations into the relation between gender and the format of items. It might of course also be of interest to look at the items flagged for DIF and try to find reasons beyond the format as to why they have been flagged. Some items which have been flagged for moderate or severe DIF might have been falsely flagged. It could be useful to rerun some items, in particular items flagged for moderate DIF on later tests to see if they are flagged again. In this study, the SvA group is, as already mentioned, rather small. A data set with a larger SvA group could produce more reliable results.

Appendix: DIF Analysis Output for the Full Tests

Tables 7.17, 7.18, 7.19 and 7.20

Table 7.17 DIF analysis of the RE9 test with respect to gender

Item	Chi-square	*p*-value	Point estimate of effect size	95 % confidence interval for effect size	ETS classification
A:3	6.88	0.01	−0.70	(−1.23, −0.18)	A
A:6	6.97	0.01	−0.70	(−1.22, −0.18)	A
A:7	22.96	0.00**	−1.25	(−1.76, −0.73)	B−
A:8	49.78	0.00**	−1.94	(−2.48, −1.39)	C−
A:9a	0.71	0.40	0.38	(−0.50, 1.26)	A
A:9b	0.42	0.52	−0.17	(−0.67, 0.34)	A
A:10a	3.73	0.05	−1.08	(−2.20, 0.04)	A
A:10b	0.28	0.60	−0.13	(−0.61, 0.36)	A
A:11a	0.41	0.52	0.24	(−0.50, 0.97)	A
A:11b	1.24	0.26	−0.29	(−0.80, 0.22)	A
B:17	8.35	0.00*	−0.09	(−0.15, −0.04)	AA
B:18	8.63	0.00*	0.10	(0.02, 0.18)	AA
B:19	5.64	0.02	−0.82	(−1.50, −0.14)	A
B:23a	0.30	0.58	0.15	(−0.38, 0.67)	A
B:23b	32.01	0.00**	0.18	(0.12, 0.24)	BB+
A:1	0.45	0.50	−0.29	(−1.13, 0.55)	A
A:2	16.52	0.00**	−1.15	(−1.71, −0.59)	B−
A:4	0.21	0.64	0.18	(−0.57, 0.93)	A
A:5	4.20	0.04	−0.86	(−1.69, −0.04)	A
A:13	1.14	0.28	−0.35	(−1.00, 0.29)	A
A:14	19.67	0.00**	0.14	(0.08, 0.21)	AA
A:15	0.60	0.44	−0.04	(−0.10, 0.02)	AA
A:16	1.99	0.16	−0.03	(−0.10, 0.05)	AA
A:22	24.56	0.00**	−0.16	(−0.23, −0.09)	BB−
A:12	82.64	0.00**	0.27	(0.21, 0.34)	BB+
B:24	3.85	0.05	−0.56	(−1.11, −0.00)	A
B:25	3.17	0.08	0.06	(−0.02, 0.14)	AA
B:20	20.60	0.00**	0.11	(0.05, 0.17)	BB+
B:21	8.58	0.00*	0.12	(0.05, 0.18)	AA

A *p*-value less than 0.005 is indicated by * and a *p*-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

Table 7.18 DIF analysis for the RE9 test with respect to SvA

Item	Chi-square	p-value	Point estimate of effect size	95 % confidence interval for effect size	ETS classification
A:3	18.46	0.00**	2.55	(1.30, 3.80)	C+
A:6	0.78	0.38	−0.49	(−1.57, 0.59)	A
A:7	26.90	0.00**	2.79	(1.66, 3.91)	C+
A:8	2.53	0.11	−0.78	(−1.76, 0.21)	A
A:9a	0.76	0.38	−0.65	(−2.12, 0.82)	A
A:9b	0.39	0.53	0.32	(−0.68, 1.33)	A
A:10a	0.08	0.77	−0.32	(−2.41, 1.78)	A
A:10b	0.46	0.50	−0.34	(−1.33, 0.64)	A
A:11a	2.77	0.10	1.43	(−0.27, 3.13)	A
A:11b	0.02	0.88	0.08	(−0.93, 1.09)	A
B:17	15.63	0.00**	0.20	(0.10, 0.30)	CC+
B:18	0.30	0.58	−0.04	(−0.17, 0.09)	AA
B:19	3.59	0.06	1.52	(0.02, 3.03)	A
B:23a	5.42	0.02	−1.27	(−2.34, −0.20)	B−
B:23b	0.31	0.57	−0.03	(−0.11, 0.06)	AA
A:1	0.08	0.77	0.23	(−1.37, 1.84)	A
A:2	2.82	0.09	0.94	(−0.19, 2.06)	A
A:4	0.40	0.52	−0.42	(−1.74, 0.89)	A
A:5	6.75	0.01	2.86	(0.61, 5.10)	B+
A:13	0.31	0.58	0.36	(−0.88, 1.59)	A
A:14	5.63	0.02	−0.14	(−0.26, −0.02)	AA
A:15	2.07	0.15	0.08	(−0.03, 0.19)	AA
A:16	12.87	0.00**	0.20	(0.09, 0.31)	BB+
A:22	5.18	0.02	0.16	(0.02, 0.29)	BB+
A:12	3.23	0.07	−0.12	(−0.24, 0.01)	AA
B:24	5.47	0.02	−1.23	(−2.26, −0.20)	B−
B:25	9.79	0.00*	−0.20	(−0.33, −0.07)	BB−
B:20	14.95	0.00**	−0.22	(−0.33, –0.11)	CC−
B:21	17.76	0.00**	−0.26	(−0.39, –0.14)	BB−

A p-value less than 0.005 is indicated by * and a p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

Table 7.19 DIF analysis of the RE6 test with respect to gender

Item	Chi-square	p-value	Point estimate of effect size	95 % confidence interval for effect size	ETS classification
A:2	1.83	0.18	0.08	(−0.00, 0.16)	AA
B:11	3.39	0.07	−0.75	(−1.55, 0.04)	A
B:12	0.68	0.41	−0.02	(−0.09, 0.05)	AA
B:15	2.30	0.13	−0.04	(−0.10, 0.02)	AA
B:17	3.67	0.06	−0.06	(−0.13, 0.02)	AA
B:18	0.03	0.86	−0.01	(−0.08, 0.07)	AA
A:1a	4.32	0.04	−0.55	(−1.07, −0.03)	A
A:1b	1.79	0.18	−0.51	(−1.24, 0.23)	A
A:1c	5.00	0.03	−0.63	(−1.18, −0.08)	A
A:1d	2.69	0.10	−0.47	(−1.04, 0.09)	A
A:1e	6.70	0.01	−0.69	(−1.21, −0.17)	A
A:1f	0.79	0.37	−0.25	(−0.79, 0.30)	A
A:1g	1.93	0.17	−0.42	(−1.01, 0.17)	A
A:1h	0.39	0.53	−0.20	(−0.82, 0.42)	A
A:1i	1.68	0.19	−0.52	(−1.31, 0.26)	A
A:1j	5.84	0.02	−0.76	(−1.37, −0.14)	A
B:14	4.12	0.04	−0.66	(−1.30, −0.02)	A
B:16	17.64	0.00**	−1.25	(−1.83, −0.66)	B-
A:4-5	0.03	0.86	−0.01	(−0.07, 0.05)	AA
A:6	0.09	0.77	−0.02	(−0.10, 0.05)	AA
A:3	33.26	0.00**	0.20	(0.12, 0.27)	BB+
A:9	1.97	0.16	0.05	(−0.03, 0.13)	AA
A:10	4.14	0.04	0.10	(0.01, 0.19)	AA
B:13	20.26	0.00**	0.14	(0.06, 0.21)	AA
A:7	0.52	0.47	0.30	(−0.52, 1.13)	A
A:8	0.62	0.43	0.01	(−0.06, 0.08)	AA
B:19	0.35	0.56	0.17	(−0.39, 0.73)	A
B:20	1.62	0.20	0.03	(−0.04, 0.10)	AA
B:21	5.44	0.02	0.09	(0.02, 0.16)	AA

A p-value less than 0.005 is indicated by * and a p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

Table 7.20 DIF analysis of the RE6 test with respect to SvA

Item	Chi-square	p-value	Point estimate of effect size	95 % confidence interval for effect size	ETS classification
A:2	36.25	0.00**	0.35	(0.24, 0.46)	CC+
B:11	0.76	0.38	−0.44	(−1.44, 0.57)	A
B:12	2.26	0.13	0.07	(−0.02, 0.16)	AA
B:15	22.58	0.00**	−0.22	(−0.31, −0.13)	CC−
B:17	21.2	0.00**	0.26	(0.16, 0.37)	BB+
B:18	24.23	0.00**	0.24	(0.14, 0.33)	BB+
A:1a	15.68	0.00**	1.61	(0.80, 2.42)	B+
A:1b	6.16	0.01	−1.12	(−2.04, −0.21)	B−
A:1c	0.71	0.40	0.36	(−0.47, 1.18)	A
A:1d	2.74	0.10	0.72	(−0.14, 1.58)	A
A:1e	45.08	0.00**	2.96	(2.07, 3.86)	C+
A:1f	0.61	0.44	0.33	(−0.50, 1.15)	A
A:1g	6.15	0.01	−1.05	(−1.89, −0.22)	B−
A:1h	3.32	0.07	0.86	(−0.07, 1.79)	A
A:1i	0.19	0.66	−0.25	(−1.33, 0.83)	A
A:1j	6.55	0.01	−1.14	(−2.01, −0.28)	B−
B:14	1.40	0.24	0.58	(−0.38, 1.53)	A
B:16	4.55	0.03	−0.98	(−1.88, −0.08)	A
A:4-5	8.46	0.00*	−0.13	(−0.23, −0.03)	BB−
A:6	20.7	0.00**	−0.20	(−0.29, −0.12)	BB−
A:3	0.00	0.97	0.00	(−0.11, 0.10)	AA
A:9	10.77	0.00**	−0.20	(−0.32, −0.08)	BB−
A:10	4.32	0.04	−0.12	(−0.24, −0.01)	AA
B:13	4.16	0.04	−0.10	(−0.21, −0.00)	AA
A:7	0.20	0.66	−0.25	(−1.35, 0.85)	A
A:8	3.06	0.08	−0.09	(−0.18, 0.00)	AA
B:19	1.61	0.20	0.55	(−0.31, 1.40)	A
B:20	2.67	0.10	−0.08	(−0.17, 0.01)	AA
B:21	1.92	0.17	−0.07	(−0.17, 0.02)	AA

A p-value less than 0.005 is indicated by *and a p-value less than 0.001 is indicated by **

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Chapter 8
Assessment in Ethics Education: Neoliberalism, Values and Alignment

Nigel Fancourt

Abstract This chapter presents an outsider's perspective on the issues raised by the Swedish contributors to this book. I first contextualise the Swedish situation within wider global policy tensions, identifying the three voices of conservatives, progressives and neoliberals, to argue that the demands of neoliberalism have created the desire for more effective and refined assessment across the curriculum. However, in the areas of religious education and ethics, this tendency has cut across long-standing debates between voices of conservatives and progressives. I then consider the principle of constructive alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, suggesting that many of the problems which the authors address can be framed in the light of this principle. In conclusion, the interrelationship between alignment and the different voices is outlined, suggesting that the different voices impinge on policymaking, curriculum planning and assessment design in different ways at different stages.

8.1   Introduction

The aims and purposes of ethics education and religious education have become increasingly complex in recent decades, as different countries and jurisdictions react to changing social, cultural and educational factors. A key development over recent decades has been an increased focus on the role of assessment across education, notably 'high-stakes' testing, and this has had a significant impact on religious education in many countries (Fancourt 2013b). The previous chapters in this book carefully address the research issues which arose out of the current Swedish response to these pressures, by critiquing, problematising and evaluating various aspects of national tests in ethics education, from conceptions of ethics to teacher education or from test fairness to the place of environmental concerns in the examination syllabus.

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But why assess ethics anyway? It is a foregone assumption of the other authors – which I share – that assessment matters, and this is in part about the ways that we acknowledge and take formal account of values in education, about valuing our values. Previous generations might have been surprised by this; even though they often had strong religious values that were passed on to successive generations (Osbeck et al. 2015), they would not have considered it appropriate to impose formal tests in this area. As an English article from the 1950s explained, 'There are some who object to the whole idea of examinations in Religious Knowledge. They assert that this is not a "suitable" subject for examination' (Guy 1952, p. 60). The problems concern the merits or dangers of prescribing a particular ethical viewpoint, deciding and defining what is to be assessed, and then creating a differential grading system. This is further complicated by the fact that it is also recognised that learning about ethics occurs either through schooling more generally, for instance, the school's ethos and ethical culture (e.g. Afdal 2005), or from the family (e.g. Heckman et al. 2014).

A starting point for exploring these issues in detail is to be found in the Swedish government's recent exemplars of different grade criteria, as set out and discussed by Olof Franck (Chap. 2). He highlights how pupils have to understand that they need to situate the term 'equality' in a wider 'language game', relating the terms to other ethical concepts. However, what is also striking is that the A-grade responses, which the government considers to be the best, are the most explicitly normative:

> Equality. I chose equality because that word says it should be equal and fair for everyone. *Unfortunately* it is not always so.
> Equality, it is equal because then everyone is treated alike. One *should* be able to like the one wants to like. (p. 31, emphasis added)

It is suggested that these pupils use the 'concepts in a developed way' (Skolverket 2013, cited in Franck p. 31), but arguably the striking feature of these responses is that the pupils take an explicitly prescriptive view of equality. The first starts by referring to the related concept of fairness and then makes an evaluative comment – 'unfortunately'. The student has surveyed the moral landscape and made a judgement on it. The second defines equality as equal treatment and then reframes it as a right – 'one should be able' – though the basis for this right is not elaborated.

It is however unclear if other approaches could also achieve the top grade, for example, a pupil who had a more critical view of equality (as Franck discusses) or indeed a pupil who preferred to describe the term more neutrally, without expressing a preference. In the latter case, the example of a C grade is instructive:

> I chose equality because girls and boys should be treated alike. And equality means that everyone should be treated the same way, that is to say that one should treat everyone alike and show respect, regard to everyone. (ibid.)

This answer links equality to similar treatment and then links it to showing respect and regard to all, involving four concepts altogether. This seems to be a well-developed answer, and it is hard to see why this is *substantially* worse – two grades worse – than the A-grade examples. It is especially mystifying if one compares it with the example of an E-grade response, 'Equality means that something is

alike or equal' (ibid.). This seems to be essentially identical to the opening clause of first A-grade response – 'equal and fair'. However, the key addition in the A-grade response is the 'unfortunately' clause, which leads to a rise of four grades, completely overtaking the C-grade example. In other words, a particular kind of reasoning is apparently being prioritised, even though the level descriptors appear to suggest a continuum within one form of ethical reasoning.

This ambiguity seems to have come about because different policy documents take a different stance on the issue, as Sporre (Chap. 6) also highlights. The curriculum aims prioritise certain normative values, including equality. However, the assessment criteria do not specify any preferred values, being neutral descriptors of ethical reasoning. Then, at the level of assessment guidance, positive responses to certain values are favoured again, in line with the curriculum aims but not the assessment criteria. There are unresolved tensions between the normative value of equality, students' moral autonomy and assessment coherence, so why and how this discrepancy has come about need exploring.

8.2 The Three Voices of Educational Discourse

In order to make sense of this particular Swedish problem, we can reframe it as a response to three broad voices within educational policy (Ball 1990, 2006), which can be seen to be at work in religious education across Europe (Fancourt 2013a, see also Fancourt 2015). These are, first, the neoconservatives (or traditionalists), who generally consider that previous models of education should be preserved or reinstated: the education of yesteryear is to be revived or retained. This is often marked by a return to older models of curriculum, such as those that emphasise the importance of Latin and Greek, or of school organisation, by, for instance, regarding traditional independent schools as models for others to emulate. This approach is often deeply suspicious of many educational changes in recent years, seeing them as morally flawed, relativistic and inherently critical of the middle classes (e.g. Phillips 1998); in religious education, it is also often associated with a 'return' to the hegemonic religious traditions of the state.

The second voice is that of the progressives, concerned with education as a means of betterment for all society, by eliminating existing social inequalities and being responsive to the needs of new and diverse communities. For this group, themes of multiculturalism, social inclusion and the expansion of education, such as higher education, would be prioritised; Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970) is a classic progressive text, aimed at building a fairer social order, not replicating the existing injustices. In Europe, this voice is often secular and multicultural in tone. The first and second voices, neoconservatives and progressives, are typically seen as being in opposition to each other, one seeing the past as a golden age to be preserved and restored for the future, the other seeing it as a dark shadow from which to escape. This rivalry is often considered to have dominated the period immediately after the Second World War, with rival views of education's role in

post-war reconstruction across Europe. I have argued that it is the defining debate in religious education across Europe, pitching religious and educational traditionalists against an alliance of secularists and religious progressives (Fancourt 2013a).

The third voice is that of neoliberals, concerned with the role of education in developing an efficient work force: education is seen as a form of vocational training, equipping young people with the skills for employment, entrepreneurship and enterprise. This voice is inherently economic, or even capitalist, in tone, and it is generally recognised that it has come to dominate educational systems both nationally and internationally in recent decades (Hill and Kumar 2009), most notably through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (Grek 2012). Thus, the OECD's Secretary-General has recently suggested that '[e]quipping young people with the skills to achieve their full potential, participate in an increasingly interconnected global economy, and ultimately convert better jobs into better lives is a central preoccupation of policy makers around the world' (OECD 2015, p. 2). Students' potential is therefore seen in terms of work and career.

However, neoliberalism does not side neatly with the other two voices, but instead cuts across them. It can be allied to neoconservatism, in serving a hierarchical view of society by grading students for appropriate employment potential, but it can also oppose it, in rejecting whatever is not economically relevant in the curriculum, such as arts or classics. Similarly, it can also be allied with progressivism in seeking to build a better future, but also opposed to it in preferring an economic vision to a communitarian one. For example, in England, Blair's New Labour policies can be seen as an uneasy combination of progressive and neoliberal voices.

8.3 Tests, Ranks and Ethics

The rise of neoliberalism is most apparent in the OECD's survey of the knowledge and skills of students, the Programme for International Student Attainment (or PISA), which has come to dominate educational discourse around the world as countries compare themselves with – and compete with – each other (Grek 2010; Meyer and Benavot 2013). Overall, Far Eastern jurisdictions dominate the most recent rankings, and based on tests in 2012, Shanghai, China; Singapore; and Hong Kong, China, were in the top three positions, with the top seven jurisdictions being in the Far East. Sweden was ranked 38th overall in 2012 (OECD 2014b, p. 5), between Lithuania and Hungary; unfortunately it 'has experienced the most rapid decline of all OECD countries' (OECD 2015, p. 32) and was the lowest placed of the Nordic countries – as against Finland in 12th place, Denmark 22nd, Iceland 27th and Norway 30th. Finland had long been seen as the European 'teacher's pet' in the PISA ranking because it had consistently performed well, despite having an education system which appeared to be at odds with the requirements of a strong testing regime (Niemi et al. 2012); however it slid down recently for no apparent reason. Instead, higher-placed European states were Liechtenstein (8th), Switzerland (9th), the Netherlands (10th) and Estonia (11th) – and Poland is the most improved.

The English-speaking countries were placed as follows: Canada 13th, Australia 19th, Ireland 20th, New Zealand 23rd, UK 26th and USA 36th. Even within the UK, the PISA results led to internal comparison, as four distinct educational jurisdictions, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, perform differently – Scotland is slightly more successful than the others (OECD 2014a).

It is not hard to find politicians, journalists and other commentators using these results to take credit for particular policies, or to discredit the policies of their opponents, or to demand that particular policies are immediately borrowed from somewhere else, usually in Asia, such as Singapore Maths. As an English commentator on a Swedish book, I find it striking that the introduction of free schools in England was openly copied from Sweden by a previous minister for education, Michael Gove (2008, 2011), when Sweden was highly ranked, but this became problematic in the light of Sweden's subsequent drop in position (Mansell 2011). Sweden was no longer considered to be worthy of emulation, and later discussions of these policies glossed over their origins. Countries and jurisdictions act and react in the light of the OECD's rankings, which come to dominate not only their own policies but also which policies are internationally 'in fashion'.

Seen in this light, the desire to assess ethics education is one part of Sweden's wider response to, and engagement with, neoliberalism. Indeed, the OECD had previously published guidance for Sweden (OECD 2011), suggesting that it should 'develop a strategic plan or national framework for evaluation and assessment' (p. 12), though this suggestion ran counter to the previous tendency towards school autonomy and decentralisation in the Swedish education system which had proved initially successful (Wikström 2006). The immediate problem behind this book (see Lilja's account in Chap. 4) emerged when national tests in the four social sciences were introduced in 2013, i.e. in geography, history, religious education and civics, which supplemented the original tests in Swedish, mathematics and English, and the science test which was introduced in 2010. The OECD did not specifically suggest that there should be tests in ethics education, but the prioritisation of testing has spread across the curriculum. The effect of this prioritisation was stark. Pupils who entered primary school in 2009 would have been expecting to sit three tests at the end of their primary schooling, but this number gradually rose to eight tests, nearly triple the original expectations.

It is unsurprising that the form and design of the tests in ethics education were modelled on the existing tests, and as Franck explains, the construction of the domain therefore may not be ideal (Chap. 2, pp. 14–16). An interesting if rather hypothetical speculation is to imagine that the sequence of subjects to be tested was in the opposite order: what if the social sciences were the original group to be tested and they became the model for testing in other subjects – how then might the national tests have been constructed and devised? In short, ethics education within the social sciences in Sweden has become part of a wider national and international processes of – and anxiety about – testing. Countries and jurisdictions test and examine because grades and marks have become a critical indicator of value in education, but the subjects that come late to this process are often required to adjust to the precedents set by those that had been prioritised initially.

However, there have been different views of the effects of the assessment agenda on ethics and religious education. In England, a leading academic once complained that the encroachment of government models of assessment meant that religious education had 'fallen victim to a technicist and standards-related political ideology of education' (Grimmitt 2000, p. 7), though others consider that examinations and assessment have led to considerable improvement in teaching and learning, and also in the status of religious education (RE Council 2013). This point is not new; as Guy (1952) pointed out decades ago, 'We must remember the child's criterion that what is not worth examining is not worth learning or attending to. And many teachers have, unconsciously at any rate, a similar principle – what is not worth examining is not worth teaching!' (p. 60). This can be seen clearly in some of the Swedish teachers' comments discussed by Lilja (Chap. 4); for instance, one teacher commented on an 'increase in status. It has been obvious that it is not only...mathematics, Swedish and English that are important' (p. 78). Given that education systems currently operate under these presumptions, it is strategically important to fall in with them, though there may be losses as well as gains.

At the heart of this book lies the problem of avoiding the 'McNamara fallacy', named after an American statistician during the Vietnam War, whose methods of analysing the strategy were increasingly at odds with the military realities. This states that:

> The first step is to measure whatever can easily be measured. This is OK as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be easily measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really does not exist. This is suicide. (Handy 1994, p. 219)

This book's focus broadly lies around the second and third steps, in order to avoid the fourth step of ignoring ethics education altogether. In response to the second step, it is vital that pupils' attainment in ethical education is neither disregarded simply because it is not easily measured nor given an arbitrary value – hence the discussions of what is assessed. This is to avoid the third step of deciding that ethics is not important because it cannot be measured; as highlighted in the teachers' comments above, being measured gave the subject importance within the curriculum.

8.4   Alignment in Ethics Education

So far, the argument has been that increasing national and international pressure from neoliberalism can explain the current need for effective assessment in ethics education. However, the other two voices in education have not yet been accounted for: neoconservatism and progressivism. To do full justice to these voices, another educational principle – alignment – must be explored a little. Education has long been seen as the site of three different systems, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Wyse et al. 2016), contrasted by Bernstein as follows: 'Curriculum defines

what counts as valid knowledge... Pedagogy defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge...and [assessment] defines what counts as a valid realisation of this knowledge on the part of the taught' (Bernstein 1973, p. 228). Alignment is the fundamental principle in linking these three, or rather it is the common-sense point that they should be in agreement with each other (e.g. Hayes 2003; Squires 2004; Martone and Sireci 2009). If, for instance, one wanted pupils to learn dance, as an important part of the curriculum, it would be foolish to deliver a series of lectures (as pedagogy) and then assess it in a written examination (as assessment). In this example, there is a complete lack of alignment. If the assessment was by judging students' performance, the three processes would still be out of alignment, because the pedagogical strategy of lectures would neither give students full access to the curriculum, nor would it have prepared them for the assessment. Clearly, in this example, the appropriate pedagogical strategy would be to rehearse and practise the dance so that students learned the appropriate aspect of the curriculum, and so they were assessed on their ability to perform. Alignment can therefore be thought of as being the harmonisation of any one element with either of the other two elements, so that there are therefore three pairs of aligned educational processes: curriculum and assessment, pedagogy and assessment and curriculum and pedagogy.

The previous chapters in this book are generally located within one of these three pairs. The majority concern the first aspect: curriculum and assessment. This is unsurprising both at a pragmatic level given the recentness of the test and also given wider global concerns about curriculum and examinations in the twenty-first century (Baird and Hopfenbeck 2016). The most obvious example from this book is Karin Sporre's argument for a greater focus on environmental ethics, as it is concerned with the substantive curriculum – with *what* is studied (Chap. 6). She highlights how environmental ethics are a part of the curriculum, but the test syllabus omits them. She also points to a tension between a desire to ensure that pupils have a strong sense of environmental responsibility and the focus in the tests on thinking processes.

Three other papers also fall within this aspect of alignment but focus on the issue of the kinds of ethical skills that should be recognised – the syntactical rather than the substantive. Olof Franck (Chap. 2) reviews the development of the current syllabus and argues for recognition in the tests of Nussbaum and Sen's theorisation of capabilities as a more coherently assessable conceptualisation of ethical thinking. Christina Osbeck (Chap. 5) inductively argues from current test papers for recognition of 'existential understandings and ethical insights' in the syllabus and in assessment. Kristoffer Larson (Chap. 3) argues for formal recognition of a different aspect of ethics, namely, 'critical thinking'. All these three papers are connected by being ultimately normative arguments about curriculum and assessment. Moreover, they debate the kinds of skills to be developed and recognised, rather than substantive question of the topics to be studied.

It is not surprising that the interrelationship between curriculum and assessment should dominate this book, given the significance of the new testing system in Swedish education: is the object of assessment being properly matched in the test, and is the test allowing for appropriate differential attainment? The first question is

that of the test's validity, i.e. whether the test measures what it claims to measure (e.g. Messick 1998). Within psychology, the measurement of moral development, including ethical reasoning, is not new. Various psychologists have commented on it, for instance, Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1981, 1984) and Colby and Kohlberg (1987) or more recently Narvaez (2014). A school-based national test however operates differently, and the second issue is its differentiating function. Such a test is not intended to be a simple pass/fail, but to require pupils' knowledge and skills to be displayed differentially – not everyone will get an A grade. Thus, as Sadler observed, 'the assessor's grading task is to find the class or grade description which best fits the object in question, in the knowledge that no description is likely to fit it perfectly' (Sadler 1987, p. 206). The challenge for the contributors to this book who argue for a new or different competence or skill is in developing appropriate criteria and grade descriptors, given that the standards are inevitably 'fuzzy' (ibid). For instance, if Larsson's argument for critical thinking was accepted at policy level, descriptions of A, C and E grades in 'identifying assumptions' and 'open-mindedness' would be needed. However, as Ennis (1993) observed, 'comprehensiveness of coverage of aspects of critical thinking is threatened in high-stakes testing' (p. 186): such a test would not be particularly nuanced. Thus, identifying an intellectual skill is only the starting point; developing a fair and coherent national system of testing it is more complex.

This moreover is not simply a technical debate. The question is about what kinds of ethics and ethical reasoning should be elevated to this significant 'test-worthy' position. There are various tensions at play here. The first tension is between a confessional and non-confessional approach, which is often a tension between traditionalists and progressives. Franck points out the differences in policy documents between these two voices (p. 23–26), and as I have argued elsewhere (Fancourt 2013a; 2015), such documents are often the result of an uneasy compromise which is unintentionally incoherent. It is unsurprising that the Swedish national curriculum refers to 'the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism" (p. 24), in an attempt to appeal to a wide variety of voices of influence, even though this combination is potentially unworkable in practice, and in their article, Osbeck at al. (2015) explain the uneasy alliance between religious education and civic values in the Swedish curriculum. Various contributors to this book seek to resolve this, positioning their contributions as 'non-confessional' (Larsson, in Chap. 3), or 'neo-Aristotelian' (Osbeck, in Chap. 5).

The second tension is between ethical norms, such as valuing equality, respect and tolerance, and a more neutral conception of ethical reasoning. The problem here is that both traditionalists and progressives consider ethics and values to be fundamental in education – even if they disagree as to what those values should be – whereas neoliberals would be less prescriptive, only requiring that students can play their part in a globally interconnected economy. Education systems generally want students to develop shared values through their schooling, as discussed in relation to the first tension, but part of the argument for a 'neutral' approach is to focus on ethical reasoning – thus Osbeck outlines the requirements of the religious education

curriculum, from aims to core content to knowledge requirements, which fluctuate between normative competences and intellectual skills such as argumentation.

A different aspect of alignment, between pedagogy and assessment, is developed in another chapter. Annika Lilja (Chap. 4) analyses teachers' experiences of teaching ethics, and how the introduction of the new syllabus and the tests has had an impact on the classroom process of teaching and learning, both in terms of how teachers appropriate these changes and tackle the tests and of the effect of testing on pupils' motivation and on subject status within school. Sweden is unusual in expecting teachers to carry out the marking of their own pupils' work in major public tests (Wikström 2006; Osbeck et al. 2015), as many other jurisdictions consider teachers inherently biased and recruit independent examiners instead. Pupils' motivation has also been examined by Koh (2012), who sought to correlate motivation with a model of stages of ethical reasoning, and Jokić and Hargreaves (2015), who consider pupils' attitudes to religious education, including assessment. However, there are some wider issues to consider too, notably the effect of the new regime on classroom assessment (Grant and Matemba 2013) and therefore on assessment *for* learning (see Jonsson et al. 2015). My own research falls within this aspect of alignment in religious education (Fancourt 2005, 2010, 2012, 2013b; Brooks and Fancourt 2012).

Lastly, Johan Tykesson's analysis (Chap. 7), while perhaps the most technical in presentation, addresses the problem of the fairness of the test – the ethics of the assessment of ethics – through differential test functioning. It raises the long-standing issue of whether particular areas of the curriculum, methods of teaching and methods of assessment unfairly favour one group of pupils over another (Gipps and Murphy 1994; Willingham and Cole 1997; Elwood 2013; Scott et al. 2014). Tykesson found that girls generally performed better than boys in the new tests. Other research on assessment confirms differential gender performances (e.g. Ben-Shakhar and Sinai 1991; Elwood 2013) and also reiterates Tykesson's finding that boys perform better on multiple-choice questions as opposed to written tasks.

This wider research however raises other questions. It suggested that boys did better on novel items, whereas girls performed better if the tests matched classroom tasks. Further, if questions were set within a context, boys were better at identifying the central question and disregarding the contextual framing, whereas girls wanted to include all the factors. Whether and how one addresses these issues depends on what one thinks ethical reasoning should be. One might argue that the nature of ethical issues is that they are often new and different; it is part of what makes them ethically troubling. On this basis, the tests should present new problems and not duplicate classroom tasks, but adopting this approach could favour boys. By contrast, one might argue that context is vital in considering ethical issues and that it is wrong to ignore the wider situation: this would favour girls. Moreover, it has been argued that men's and women's ethical reasoning are different and that women are more relational than men (Gilligan 1982), so one should not expect the same ethical reasoning from both boys and girls. For instance, there is a debate as to whether critical thinking (which Larsson advocates) is essentially masculine and rationalistic (Wheary and Ennis 1995). On this basis boys and girls would have different tests, which would be controversial.

There are further dimensions of fairness. Tykesson's second concern, pupils with Swedish as their second language, may go some way to addressing issues of ethnic and religious diversity. In this respect there are arguments about claims for the universality of moral judgements (Gibbs et al. 2007), especially given the range of different ethical approaches and especially within and between different religions (Schweiker 2004). One should not assume that pupils would all reason ethically in the same way, and it could be argued that this test further undermines the position of religious minorities within largely secular Sweden by prioritising one model of ethical reasoning (Cetrez 2011). Indeed, the current model and indeed the alternatives proposed in this book are largely post-Christian and Western – there is little discussion of, for instance, broad Islamic principles, which might play a part in Islamic religious education in Sweden, and therefore in assessment (Berglund 2014).

A third dimension of educational inequality – which Tykesson does not address – is social class. One could hypothesise that more articulate middle-class pupils would perform better than working-class pupils, notably given the degree of linguistic skill potentially demanded in such explicit ethical reasoning, as some classic sociologists of education would suggest (e.g. Bernstein 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977): middle-class pupils might be more likely have the requisite cultural capital to express nuanced, reasoned explanations of ethical issues than working-class pupils. Thus, not only does the choice of which model of ethics is used in the curriculum raise several questions of fairness, a second-order question is what ethical framework underpins the assessment process, in deciding what is or is not appropriate and fair.

8.5   Conclusion

The Swedish authors in this book present a variety of critical research perspectives on the challenges of addressing the process of assessing ethics in the new Swedish curriculum, offering critiques and alternatives, and furthermore they are engaged in a wider principled and sustained analysis of this new approach to testing ethical education. What I have sought to present in this chapter is a wider perspective on these problems, first by considering why testing has become so important within education, as part of the neoliberal imaginary, and then how this has impinged on more typical debates in education between traditionalist neoconservatives and progressives. However, these different voices do not simply influence policymaking alone; they filter into different stages of the process, from curriculum planning to test design and to assessment procedures. Some of the complications and glitches which the authors identify may be because of these wider structural forces and tensions.

This book's significance therefore lies in how it opens up a variety of issues for critical review. There are both the technical problems of the identification of specific competences or differential item functioning, as well as wider concerns about the nature and operation of the assessment of ethics education. What is significant is

that these issues are being addressed rigorously, and as a result some suggestions for further research easily follow. First, it would be valuable to ascertain how teachers address the pedagogical challenges of teaching for these tests, and whether it affects their own choice of classroom tasks and strategies. In this respect, a more detailed look at the alignment of pedagogy and assessment in this area would be instructive, including assessment for learning. Second, there should be more longitudinal research as this new form of testing in ethics develops over time, to see how it is shaped and developed, which policy voices come to the fore, and how technical problems are addressed and resolved – or not. Lastly, it would be instructive if there were more international comparisons of summative assessment, in examinations and tests in religious education and ethics education. Indeed this book will, I hope, lead to a more open discussion of and research into assessment and testing on this area. When conducted well, assessment is a critical and inevitable part of current education, and a way of both supporting pupils' progression and accrediting their attainment; assessment of ethics is one way of recognising the importance of ethics for pupils' education, both in Sweden and elsewhere. But issues of fairness and equality surround the assessment process, not least because the ethics of the test is as contentious as the ethics in the test. In this respect, the task of ensuring that that the tests themselves work efficiently, effectively and indeed ethically has only just started.

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Chapter 9
The Assessment of Ethics and the Ethics of Assessment

Julian Stern

Abstract The assessment of ethics raises ethical questions, questions about the ethics being taught and the ethics of the assessment process. These questions, in turn, raise issues about the purposes of schooling. Exploring the preliminary challenges (various views on teaching ethics and on assessing ethics), and the political context of ethics education, the chapter also explores the problem of performativity in schools. Central to the argument is the deeply personal nature of assessment feedback, and three case studies are provided of research on assessment feedback in the UK and the USA. Assessment is therefore portrayed in this chapter as itself an ethical process – not trivially ethical, but central to the ethics of educators and those being educated. By considering the ethical significance of assessment, the chapter promotes a consideration of the personal, dialogic and creative opportunities that assessment processes provide. Once the ethics of assessment is recognised, the assessment of ethics has a good chance of making a rich contribution to the school curriculum.

9.1 Introduction

Swedish schools are assessing ethical competence. They are far from alone in this. Within the last 30 years, there have been moves, globally, to intensify assessment systems in schools. In part, this has been to enable local, national and international comparisons to be made of school students, of teachers, of schools, and of national systems. However, assessment has also been intensified in order to enable the 'consumers' of schooling (parents and carers, future employers, and all too rarely school pupils/students) to have information on which to base decisions about schooling effectiveness. There is nothing new about school students being assessed, of course, but the intensification has involved more assessment (at a variety of ages) and the assessment of more aspects of the school experience. Some subjects raise their profile as a result of assessment practices. The widespread political use of assessment

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data on literacy, numeracy and science, such as in PISA and TIMSS/PIRLS (http://www.oecd.org/pisa/ and http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/), has been striking. And this may be complemented by more intensified assessment of a wider set of 'core subjects', for political purposes, such as the UK's EBacc of English, mathematics, science, a foreign language and history or geography (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc). Other subjects will then come under pressure to present their own assessment data and their own local, national or international comparisons (as Lilja, in this volume, explains).

The introduction in Sweden of a 'complete' curriculum for schools, including assessment expectations for every subject (Skolverket 2011), is an attempt to broaden assessment, to assess all subjects of the curriculum and – notwithstanding an emphasis on 'knowledge' – to assess the more behavioural and attitudinal aspects of the curriculum, the 'application' of knowledge. This seems to me to be a healthy democratisation of assessment processes. Inevitably, it also presents challenges. The assessment of ethics is a good example of a problem that, in the context of intensified assessment systems, is better grasped than avoided. How to assess ethics and the application of ethical 'knowledge' raises wonderfully rich and complex questions. Noddings refers to the purpose of schooling as 'producing "better adults"', which is clearly an ethical task. She continues that '[s]ome would object that [this] leads to interminable argument', but 'in response, I argue that such talk keeps the intellectual door open to dialogue, reflection, analysis, collegiality, and creative planning' and '[i]t *should* be interminable' (Noddings 2015: 1–2). So the value of assessment of ethics – in Sweden or elsewhere – is precisely that it can help teachers and young people in schools, and wider communities, to engage in such an 'interminable argument'.

In this chapter, I will argue for a movement from consideration of the assessment of ethics to the ethics of assessment. The inevitable challenges of assessing ethics lead to a clear conclusion that assessment is itself an ethical process. Case studies are provided of attempts to make assessment exemplify certain ethical or spiritual principles. These have implications for assessment in general and the assessment of ethics in particular.

9.2   Assessing Ethics: Some Preliminary Challenges

As an educational researcher with a background in philosophy, I am fascinated by the strengthening of 'ethics' in the most recent version of the Swedish curriculum and the requirement to assess this aspect of school life. There are plenty of challenges to teaching and assessing ethics – or morality or politics or religion or character or values or virtues. But the starting point of any consideration of the challenges is this: children and young people in schools will come with ethical positions already established, and schools will be promoting ethics, whether or not it is on the curriculum. Children and young people are not blank ethical slates, and schools cannot be ethically neutral (because if they were, that too would be an ethical

position). The first question is not, therefore, 'shall we introduce children and young people for the first time to ethics?' It is, 'whose ethics shall we promote to these (already ethical) children and young people?' The Swedish curriculum is clear in its promotion of a particular ethical position.

> The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. (Skolverket 2011: 9.)

However, each of these values is itself contested, as is its relationship to the 'Christian tradition' and 'Western humanism' (as discussed by Larsson, in this volume). And the curriculum also, sensibly, states that there are other values, also, that should be discussed besides these. Teachers should 'clarify and discuss with the pupils the basic values of Swedish society and their consequences in terms of individual actions', but they should also 'openly communicate and discuss *different* values, views and problems' (Skolverket 2011: 14, emphasis added). The openness is critical here; otherwise the 'different' values would simply be presented in order for them to be dismissed as 'incorrect' or 'inappropriate'.

A second set of challenges, in the teaching and assessment of ethics, is to balance the ability to demonstrate a good understanding of ethics, with the ability to act ethically (i.e. according to some ethical code), and with the ability to act in accordance with an ethical code promoted by the school. Someone who has no commitment to any ethical principles (who might be described as having some characteristics of psychopathy) might be able to argue effectively, and to be assessed at a high level, without ever applying this in the rest of life. As one teacher says, 'In one way it is more important that they are good human beings, of course it is more important, but I cannot grade that' (in the chapter by Lilja, in this volume). A similarly troubling situation is that of a person who argues for, and follows, an ethical code that contradicts that of the school – for example, a code of ethics that is based on the fundamental inequality of men and women or of different ethnic groups. Would an articulate proponent of such ethics be able to be graded highly in the assessments? This is not a trivial example, and it is not an example based on extremes (a mass murderer, say, or a well-known dictator from history), but just a distinct ethical code that would normally be frowned upon in Swedish schools in the twenty-first century. This is not an easy issue to resolve, and there is a long history of philosophical and political debate over the limits of liberalism or of liberty. What is important to realise is that in schools around the world, teachers will be grappling with such issues, and the assessment of ethics may highlight the challenge – and may push teachers in one direction or another, towards or away from imposing limits on choice of ethical positions.

The assessment of ethics can seem odd, because we are more used to assessing more easily quantifiable aspects of learning and because it is difficult to see how a low grade in ethics says anything other than 'this is a bad person' – which teachers are, thankfully, reluctant to say. Of course, there is a long history of measuring

exactly how good or bad a person is, with Dante's *Divine Comedy* (http://www.divinecomedy.org/) being a model of carefully graded judgements, albeit with 'minus' scores (for different levels in purgatory and hell) and 'plus' scores (for different levels in paradise). (Could negative scores be used in schools, to indicate skills in articulating or applying inappropriate or unwelcome ethical positions?) But there is an understandable reluctance to judge ethics in such ways. And when 'levels' are described, in ethics and morality, they often follow a stage pattern (such as that of Kohlberg 1981), and there is a tendency of such systems to move towards greater universality. That reflects the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy of otherwise contrasting ethicists such as Kant (1964) or Mill (1910). However, it works less well with personalist philosophers such as Macmurray (1991), Buber (2002), Levinas (Hand 1989) or Løgstrup (1997) or care ethicists such as Noddings (1984). Are ethical qualities demonstrated by greater levels of individual care and the ability to be in 'real dialogue' (Buber 2002: 22, and see Avest et al. 2009) or by greater degrees of generalisability or universality of the principles followed? An emphasis in the Swedish curriculum on '[a]nalysis and argumentation' (Skolverket 2011: 180) might seem to favour the latter approach, but the acknowledgement of '[v]iews of the good life' and 'virtue ethics' (Skolverket 2011: 180) allows for a more complex view of ethics – and more difficulty, therefore, in its assessment. 'High level' ethical development is demonstrated, in the Swedish curriculum, in this way:

> Pupils can apply **well developed** reasoning to daily moral questions and what it might mean to do good. Pupils make reflections which **carry the reasoning forward and deepen or broaden it** and use some ethical concepts in a **well** functioning way. (Skolverket 2011:182)

As it is the 'reasoning' that is prioritised in this statement, I would suggest that the more universalist approaches to ethics are prioritised. However, close analysis of how the assessment tasks are tackled, and how this is assessed, is needed – and this volume starts that research.

Along with the moral philosophy dimension of the assessment of ethics, there is a political dimension. Politicians are keen to blame schools for all the sins of society and/or to see schools as the only way to improve people. The biggest crises in human history are generally responded to by a call for changes in education: after World War Two, there was a dramatic increase in the proportion of the world's population being schooled – with the aim of promoting peace and avoiding the terrors that preceded and accompanied the war. The same happened after 9/11. On both occasions, politics, religion and ethics were intertwined. Sometimes, ethics education is promoted as a way of improving intercultural understanding and is based on 'universally agreed' values. At other times, ethics education is promoted as a way of maintaining a particular tradition, often a tradition identified with a nation – as in the 'basic values of Swedish society' (Skolverket 2011: 14, quoted above) or the oddly similar 'fundamental British values' (DfE 2011: 14). Noddings recognises the good social and political reasons for moral and ethical education, and the dangers. Her own approach favours a conversational form of moral education. Others, she says, have recommended conversational moral education, but that might

be the 'highly idealised conversation' suggested by Habermas (1984), or the 'immortal conversation' suggested by Newman (1907), which has a tendency to a conservative elitism (Noddings 1994). Her own approach is a liberalising conversation that breaks down disciplinary barriers and goes 'well beyond the narrow skills and concepts of today's school subjects'. This is 'ordinary conversation', or 'real conversation', between adults and young people 'in which all parties speak, listen and respond to one another' (Noddings 1994).

> What qualities must ordinary conversation have, if it is to be valuable as moral education? First, the adult participants must be reasonably good people – people who try to be good, who consider the effects of their acts on others and respond to suffering with concern and compassion. Secondly, the adults must care for the children and enjoy their company. When children engage in real talk with adults who like and respect them, they are likely to emulate those adults. Even if the purpose of conversation is rarely explicit moral education, matters of moral interest will arise. … Many parents and teachers make the mistake of treating children's talk as "cute", and this habit is often carried even into the teenage years. Parents listen and smile when their teenager expresses an opinion on a political or social problem. The opinion is not taken seriously and the adults do not press the child for evidence, point out feasible alternatives, express their own views seriously or confess their own confusion. In other words, these parents do not really converse with their children and the children do not learn to listen attentively. (Noddings 1994)

Such an approach does not fit well with tightly described curriculum documents, yet it is described by Noddings as critical to understanding how moral and ethical development takes place. She continues, perhaps to the frustration of those wishing to construct a curriculum, that '[p]erhaps most significantly of all, in ordinary conversation, we are aware that our partners in conversation are more important than the topic'.

> Participants are not trying to win a debate; they are not in a contest with an opponent. They are conversing because they like each other and want to be together. The moment is precious in itself. The content of the conversation, the topic, may or may not become important. Sometimes it does, and the conversation becomes overtly educative and memorable on that account. At other times, the only memory that lingers is one of warmth and laughter or sympathy and support. (Noddings 1994)

It is a good example of the social and political difficulty of addressing ethics in school, and of its necessity, too. I suspect Noddings would not be keen on the precise assessment of ethics, in part because – in judging the rationality of the argument – we are seeing ethical debate in an 'idealised' way, rather than a personal, care-oriented way.

The other problem Noddings identifies that is relevant to the assessment of ethics is the danger of 'competitive' ethics education, of 'winning' or 'losing' such debates. That is a potential problem for children and young people, and it is also a potential problem for teachers. Where teachers can be praised or blamed, promoted or demoted, for the performance of their pupils/students, the assessment of ethics can contribute to the performative pressures on teachers. In Ball's striking phrase, the 'teacher's soul' is endangered by 'the terrors of performativity' (Ball 2003: 215). Performativity has an interesting relationship to ethics. Clearly, ethics are 'performed', in the sense that ethical living is a way of being in the world, and are

not simply a set of beliefs. The term 'performativity' was developed in its current form by the philosopher Austin, for whom performative utterances are those which have a direct effect, without or independent of any truth or falsehood (Austin 1975: 8). Austin understood performative utterances as, potentially, positive or negative – placing a bet, saying 'I do' at a wedding or using an insulting term to refer to a person. But it is the negative – harmful and/or insincere – performative utterances that have more recently become central to the sense of performativity as used by Ball, for example. Within schools, performativity is seen as or has become 'a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)', such that 'performances … serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection' (Ball 2003: 216). Ball says 'a kind of *values schizophrenia* is experienced by individual teachers where commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance', so that 'while we may not be expected to care about each other we are expected to 'care' *about* performances' (Ball 2003: 224–228). Barnett, however, brings out some of the positive aspects of performativity: 'the ideas of "performance" and even "performative" and "performing" can have more positive connotations: such ideas can point to and urge practices that invite involvement, commitment and energy on the part of the student' (Barnett, in Barnett 2005: 106).

Why is this important for the ethics of assessment? It suggests that substantive ethics may be forgotten if the 'performers' are not personally involved in and committed to the performance (i.e. their 'performance' of an ethical way of living), but are instead directed towards the *measurement* of the performance – the 'outcome measures' – in terms of grades. That is, performativity is not in itself problematic, it is the direction of the performance – who or what the performance is *for* – that determines whether or not performativity is positive or negative with respect to substantive ethics. Four dimensions of research on assessment are described in the preface to this book: the construction of questions, the pupil/student views demonstrated by their responses, the nature or quality of the teaching, and the ways in which teachers identify qualities in pupil/student responses. Given the preliminary challenges I have outlined in this chapter, I will explore a set of issues that cut across all four dimensions, centred on the idea of assessment as itself an ethical process – that is, investigating how the process of assessment can be 'performed' in a way that is appropriately engaged and committed.

9.3   Seeing Assessment as an Ethical Process

Some researchers recognise the ethical and political implications of assessment (Gipps and Murphy 1994; Stobart 2008), but my own research on assessment processes in schools started in an unusual place. In 2009, I completed a large international project on the 'spirit of the school' (Stern 2009). That project attempted to

investigate and describe how schools work as learning communities and how they do this internally (their 'ethos' or 'culture') and externally (reaching beyond themselves, achieving 'transcendence'). The emerging definition of the spirit of the school was this, in a shorter and a longer version:

> The spirited school is an inclusive community with magnanimous leadership that enables friendship through dialogue in order to create and evaluate valuable or beautiful meanings, valuable or beautiful things, and good people.
>
> The spirited school is an inclusive (bringing in from past times and local and distant places) community (people treating each other as ends in themselves) with magnanimous leadership (aiming for the good of the led) that enables (but does not insist on) friendship (by overcoming fear and loneliness and allowing for solitude) through dialogue (not monologue) in order to create and evaluate valuable or beautiful meanings, valuable or beautiful things (including the environment), and good (real) people. (Stern 2009: 160–161)

Having developed this definition of the spirit of the school, founded on interviews and other activities with 144 pupils/students, teachers and head teachers/principals in the UK and Hong Kong, China, I wanted to test out the definition on a single aspect of schools. Working with a co-researcher (Anita Backhouse, with the consequent publication being Stern and Backhouse 2011), I derived a set of six questions that could be asked of assessment (or any other dimension of schooling): Who do you bring in? How do you treat people as ends in themselves? In what ways are you magnanimous? How do you enable friendship to thrive? Are you in dialogue? How do you take part in creating meanings, things and people? The first four questions (and the elements of the definition from which they derived) connect to the community theory of Macmurray (1991), whilst the fifth and sixth questions are focused on dialogue and learning, connected to Buber's theorising of dialogue and of creative learning (Buber 2002, Chaps. 1 and 3, respectively). We decided to test the definition on an aspect of school and university life that troubled us both: written assessment feedback. Producing such feedback was time-consuming and yet often passed over in silence by pupils/students in school and students in university. It seemed as though professionals in schools and universities were spending a long time producing written feedback, but in practice this was targeted more at professional colleagues (managers and external examiners) than at pupils/students – and was therefore potentially a good example of the distorting effect of performativity.

Exploring the inner workings of assessment processes, we were looking, in the phrase of Black and Wiliam, 'inside the black box' (Black and Wiliam 1998; ARG 1999). That is, we were investigating what goes on *within* assessment processes, rather than taking those for granted and investigating only the *results* of assessment processes. In the following section of this chapter, there is a more detailed account of the results of the research. Here, it is worth highlighting the two ideas that the co-researchers discussed at length during the research and that became more confidently asserted as a result of the empirical research. One was the idea that assessment feedback is one of the most personal, individual and (potentially) *touching* forms of communication between educator and pupil/student (Johnston 2004). It is or can be a form of 'real dialogue', in Buber's terms. Notwithstanding the common

assertion by educators that 'marking' (i.e. providing written comments on pupil/ student work) is one of the most boring and frustrating of their tasks, the communication involved – to and from the educator – is often the most intensely personal, individual conversation between the two people concerned. As with any conversation, the opportunity for real dialogue can be thrown away, to be replaced by the exchange of information (Buber's 'technical dialogue') or by something like 'monologue disguised as dialogue'. But the opportunity for real dialogue remains.

The second idea that was discussed, and that became more prominent following the research, was that assessment policies had less influence than might be expected. In UK schools and UK higher education, there are strong, clear policies on assessment at national and institutional levels, dominated by descriptions of performance levels and learning outcomes. Yet from the point of view of pupils/students, the influence of assessment was much more the result of the perception of the 'personal' nature of written comments than it was about levels and outcomes. That is not to say policies were insignificant. Policies seemed to have an influence on teachers/ lecturers and their perceptions of the nature of their work. It is that the influence did not seem to reach 'inside the black box' to affect how pupils/students 'read' the assessment feedback received. Seeing assessment as an ethical process therefore needs to take account of the fine detail of assessment processes, inside the black box, as well as the large-scale issues. The dialogue between educator and learner that is involved in assessment is – or certainly can be – deeply personal, able to demonstrate the 'rich' and 'authentic' characteristics highlighted by Blaylock (2000: 45). In the following section, I provide information from three case studies of this dialogue, starting with the initial very small-scale study already mentioned (Stern and Backhouse 2011).

9.4 Case Studies of Written Assessment Feedback

Three case studies are provided of research on assessment feedback, relevant to work on ethics. All three are very small scale – between the three studies, only a small number of pupils/students in six schools were involved – so they are not attempting to be comprehensive or representative. They are starting points for discussion with children and young people, and school staff, of the issues raised by assessment feedback. The three are linked. Starting with my own study with Anita Backhouse (itself an extension of broader work on the spirit of the school), that article was read by Matthew Geiger, who was interested in how that could complement and extend his work with US schools; and Julie McGonigle wanted to explore the work in the UK, looking at how assessment feedback might contribute to a school's 'core values' (or 'virtues' or 'character').

The first case study (Stern and Backhouse 2011) is based on work in one state primary school with children aged 9–10, complemented by research with undergraduate teacher education students in a university and lecturers in the same university in the UK. They responded to versions of the six questions described earlier in

this chapter, exploring aspects of community and of dialogue and creativity, through analysis of assessment feedback. Children gave their views of comments on their work, saying 'nice comments i am proud of this work' and 'I feel proud of this comment':

> Both of these indicate a sense of the personal engagement of the teacher. Another pupil says that 'the things that the teacher said makes the child want to improve'. In contrast, there is a sense of loss or being 'left out', in the comment from another pupil: 'I thought it was a good piece of work and she [the teacher] hasn't marked anything (both pages)'. The pupils, in discussion with the researcher, returned to the issue of wanting to be valued, themselves, for their work, and of wanting to be proud. If they did not feel proud, either because of the teacher's comments or their own feeling of not doing well, then this was demotivating. (Stern and Backhouse 2011: 341)

Children were keen that teachers saw beyond the mistakes. It might be described as a failure in magnanimity if teachers seem to children to be 'catching them out' by merely looking for mistakes.

> 'All she has done', says one pupil, 'is marked mastakes agine!!!', and another says that 'Pointing out moor spellings mastakes makes me feel very bad inside'. Magnanimous teachers would not 'only market bad things', but would put 'good and bad at the same time', as 'we need marking show us what we are good at and what we need to improve on'. (Stern and Backhouse 2011: 342)

There were more 'friendly' and 'unfriendly' comments identified by children, and one child said of a teacher: 'she should be more friendly' because 'if I was the person that did the work I would feel sad' (Stern and Backhouse 2011: 342). Children wanted to improve their work and were prepared to accept criticism provided it was done in a friendly, supportive way. They wanted dialogue and not monologue or non-dialogic 'ticks'.

> One pupil said 'I think instead of a tick the should be something like good tranclating english into french', whilst others said 'Please write a comment' or 'Please say why you like it!'. In discussion, the children were very vocal in their condemnation of unqualified ticks and 'goods'. They recognised the need for corrections being highlighted but felt that a balance was needed, and really wanted to see dialogue. Conversely, where there were extended comments (more than two or three sentences) some of the children dismissed them and said in an exasperated voice 'Oh, I can't be bothered to read that – there's too much!'. (Stern and Backhouse 2011: 343)

The children saw marking as an important way of helping them to improve – to improve as people, rather than simply to produce better work or better marks. If feedback is not, or is not perceived as, so personally creative, then the children will be missing out. The dialogic and progressive feedback was not a matter of *quantity* of feedback: 'although more extensive feedback is clearly able to demonstrate a wide variety of qualities, some of the most 'spirited' comments were very short, and some longer comments were dismissed as exasperating' (Stern and Backhouse 2011: 344).

The second case study is of the work of Geiger (2015, 2016). This is a project carried out with young people aged 15–18 in three episcopalpiscopal (Anglican, Christian) high schools in the USA, based on a personalist theology (Spaemann 2006;

Smith 2005) and an ethnographic, participatory action research methodology. Geiger and colleagues introduced an approach he describes as 'notebooking' or 'journalling': 'Students used notebooks to write personal reflections on course content, which were read by the teacher and responded to in a sometimes more, sometimes less, relational manner' (Geiger 2016: 18). It is important to stress the 'more' or 'less' in this phrase. In two of the three schools, the teacher responses were perceived as genuinely conversational (what I would refer to, in Buber's terms, as 'real dialogue'), whilst in the third school, they were not. In that third school, '"We were faking it," said Angie' (Geiger 2015: 177).

In this project, the young people wrote something about their own lives (about an issue that illustrated a particular virtue or character strength), and the teacher would write something in response, and the written comments continued – like a conversation. This is not strictly 'assessment feedback', but it is 'teacher feedback', with the teacher commenting on what the student has written. The teachers involved did have assessment responsibilities, though – this was not an example of teachers saying 'here, we are not really teachers, so you can talk freely'. Perhaps a good way to describe it would be as '(assessment) *feedback*' rather than '*assessment* (feedback)'. When it worked, it was certainly 'formative', and could be described as 'formative assessment feedback' (Clarke 2001; Moss and Brookhart 2009; Wiliam 2009). Whether it could be extended to a conversation entirely independent of assessment is a separate issue, explored by Hart et al. 2004, who write of learning that is 'free from the needless constraints imposed by ability-focused practices, free from the indignity of being labelled top, middle or bottom, fast or slow, free from the wounding consciousness of being treated as someone who can aspire at best to only limited achievements' (Hart et al. 2004: 3).

Assessment feedback can at least contribute to genuine dialogue. Here is a young person describing what a genuine conversation was like:

> [The teacher] would always personalize [the comments], she wouldn't generalize them. That conversation – it wasn't, like, a physical conversation, but it was a written conversation – that just really inspired me to always keep writing exactly what I thought rather than trying to cover things up. (Geiger 2016: 20)

A brief extract from one such exchange can illustrate the depth and sensitivity of some of the conversations:

> Maddie: *When my father died, I shunned God altogether. Some have stories of coming closer to this God, but I only put distance between the already small connection I had….*
> Mr. Lisbon: *I can only imagine*.
> Maddie: *Now, upon reflecting, I realize I still sort of acknowledge this God.*
> Mr. Lisbon: *Isn't it strange that not believing is still sort of a relationship?*
> Maddie: *I am angry. Angry at this one entity. I question the existence, but no matter how much I question, I am still frustrated. This might be my covenant. This, of course, is nothing light-hearted or joyous, but this God might let me blame him, even if he doesn't exist.*
> (Geiger 2016: 21)

The teacher goes on to talk about his experiences, and the conversation continues. What was the difference, for the students, between a 'genuine' conversation

('real dialogue') and one that was not genuine (either 'technical dialogue' or 'monologue disguised as dialogue')? Geiger asks a student, Kiri:

> MWG: If you were doing this, these reflection exercises, and Mr. Lisbon never read them... do you think that you would be aware of the benefits… if no one read them?
>
>   Kiri: Definitely not. Especially because if he didn't read them, I wouldn't care what I wrote down. I would get it over with. I would get participation, a grade for it. But the fact that he reads it means that I actually try to write something reflective down, and I try to actually get a good grade on it, because then I think it's more beneficial having him read it and having him give us feedback. (Geiger 2016: 23)

Conversation of this kind is at the heart of developing personhood, for Geiger, and one of his conclusions is that 'the … project … found that at the very heart of relational notebooking the drive to become a person formed a stabilizing spine for a student's notebook' (Geiger 2016: 28). Geiger found, somewhat to his own surprise, that students were themselves surprised that teachers took such care in listening to them. As a teacher myself who has spent more hours than I can count providing written feedback on student work, I too find it surprising and upsetting that students might not think of this as a 'real' conversation, but as something much more 'generic' – as in the quotation used in the following writing:

> When students spoke about how they engaged in reflection and took the risk involved in opening up their inner lives to the teacher, they quickly described how amazed, surprised, and deeply grateful they were for the care, attention, and generous responsiveness that the teachers gave them in written feedback. Students frequently spoke of the personal nature of the feedback and how the comments were "genuine," rather than "generic," and how this showed that "the teacher *actually* had to have read" what a student wrote. … Many students … described the practice of reflection and feedback as a "conversation." (Geiger 2015: 176)

This case study certainly extends the work of Stern and Backhouse by developing the written dialogue between the teacher and student beyond a single exchange and does it outwith the explicit framework of assessment processes. It is valuable for both those reasons and provides a powerful argument for making even the briefest of written feedback from teachers into opportunities for real connection with pupils/students.

The third case study is based on work carried out by Julian Stern and Julie McGonigle in a UK school with a Christian foundation, pseudonymously *Peel Academy*, with 40 students aged 14–15 and 35 students aged 16–17. This project is still in process and has not (at the time of writing) been fully published, so the data and analysis presented here are tentative and intended as merely indicative. The focus was on how assessment feedback might contribute to a school's 'core values' (or 'virtues' or 'character'). The core values are 'honourable purpose' (i.e. 'to be positive in everything, doing what is good and aiming to benefit others as well as ourselves'), humility, compassion, integrity, accountability, courage and determination. We investigated student perceptions of how written assessment feedback might contribute to the development of these values, but – following Geiger's example – first asked about how it might contribute to the students' *personhood*. Students were asked to 'write a list for teachers of ways that they can make their marking and feedback more helpful to you as a person'. Here are some responses from students

(with the spelling retained as presented), starting with the request for more *depth* and *challenge*, a counter-intuitive response – counter-intuitive, at least, for those who think of school students as 'naturally' attempting to avoid work and reluctant to stretch themselves:

> Give challenging goals that relate to questions on the work (student aged 14–15)
>> More challenging targets (student aged 14–15)
>> If I score highly I would still appreciate more challenge (student aged 14–15)
>> Give challenging targets (student aged 14–15)
>> Use more questions, more research demanding responses (student aged 14–15)
>> Give improvement points even if it is good (student aged 16–17)
>> Go into more depth on how I can improve, not just what I am doing wrong (student aged 16–17)
>> Ask questions to make students think more deeply (student aged 16–17)

Other responses on this 'personhood' question asked for a downplaying of presentation and raising the profile of academic, subject-based skills: 'more feedback on skills rather than presentation', 'targets about skill not presentation' and 'asking questions, invoking thought rather than pointing out mistakes, no presentation (content is key)' (students aged 14–15). Some students focused instead on the more personal issues: 'take note of the students name' (student aged 14–15), 'aim it at me not just a general person' (student aged 16–17), and 'talk us through it individually' (student aged 16–17). Being positive was seen as important: 'more motivational comments' (student aged 14–15), 'more praise' (student aged 14–15), and 'more positives' (student aged 16–17). And clarity was also important: 'be more specific' (student aged 14–15) and 'be clear about what needs to be changed' and 'don't use words like 'good'' (student aged 16–17).

On the core values, a number of students thought assessment feedback helped them develop determination and courage, but there were few references to other values. The students were asked to look through their work and copy out teacher comments that helped them develop values and explain why these helped:

> 'second inference and support': I think this helped me show determination to get a better mark and humility to admit I should improve it (student aged 14–15)
>> 'keep up the good work': it made me believe I could get a good grade which gave me courage and determination (student aged 14–15)
>> 'an emerging awareness of business purpose, a nice start': it gave me the courage to speak up when I wanted help (student aged 14–15)
>> 'beautiful lexical choice and sensitive understanding of memory': gave me courage and determination (student aged 16–17)

None of the students picked out negative comments by teachers as helping them be more courageous. It may take courage to face negative criticism, of course, but students in this study found they developed more courage as a result of constructive, developmental, positive comments. In contrast, students were demotivated by comments they did not understand or comments that focused on the presentation of their work. The teacher comment 'underline date and titles' was described by a student aged 14–15 as demotivating: 'it wastes time and it has nothing to do with my learning'.

These three small case studies provide significant confirmation of the ethical importance of assessment feedback. It is worth emphasising that the case studies were not related to the subject of 'ethics education'. Geiger's study was of activities within the religious education curriculum, not specifically focused on ethics education, and the other two studies were carried out in other lessons such as science, English and business studies. They are presented as all the more valuable because they are not 'assessing ethics' but, instead, are approaches to formative assessment feedback that are in themselves recognised by children and young people as contributing to ethical education.

9.5   Conclusion

The assessment of ethics, in Sweden or in any jurisdiction, raises a number of questions: What is the position of ethics education in the school curriculum and in political life? What kind of ethics are to be promoted and assessed? To what extent is ethical *behaviour* to be assessed or the ability to construct ethical *arguments*? And how is the assessment of ethics to be used to judge teachers or schools? Assessment is portrayed in this chapter as itself an ethical process – not trivially ethical, but central to the ethics of educators and those being educated. The work on the construction of an ethics curriculum and its assessment, represented in this book, is an important contribution to debates on ethics in school and society. By considering the ethical significance of assessment, I hope to promote a consideration of the personal, dialogic and creative opportunities that assessment processes provide. And by steering debate in this direction, it is hoped that negative performativity can be replaced by positive performativity. Negative performativity is all too often associated with assessment: teachers and schools become directed towards 'performing' for the sake of external targets, inspectors or auditors, or public 'league tables' of schools or nations. This can be flooded out by a positive performativity, in which teachers are directly influencing the ethical development of their pupils/students by engaging in personally affecting dialogue in assessment feedback. Black and Wiliam stressed the need for 'the active involvement of pupils in their own learning', as 'a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning' (ARG 1999: 4). They note 'the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve', and 'involv[ing] both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data' (ARG 1999: 4). The case studies described here take that work further, reframing assessment as central to ethical development. Without such a redirection towards the personal aspects of assessment, the assessment of ethics will always be in danger of defeating the very purpose of an ethics curriculum. But once the ethics of assessment is recognised, the assessment of ethics has a good chance of making a rich contribution to the school curriculum.

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Chapter 10
Concluding Remarks and Future Directions

Olof Franck

Abstract In this last chapter, some concluding remarks are presented with reference to the various chapters. These remarks are related to the paths for future research that were presented in the introduction, and these paths are, in an introductive way, correlated to the research questions that are in focus in the research project of which the book is a part.

In the foregoing chapters, several issues relating to the national tests in RE have been discussed with reference to the research approaches presented. The common aim has been to highlight the concept of ethical competence, such as this may be interpreted and developed with regard to the items focusing on ethics in the tests.

A critical analysis of how the concept in question is dealt with in the syllabus and in the tests was carried out in the second chapter, and some suggestions for the development of the assessment of ethical competence were presented. In the third chapter, another dimension of measuring ethical competence was discussed, namely, one which may be formulated in terms of "critical thinking". In the fourth and the fifth chapters, teachers' and pupils' approaches for dealing with items regarding ethics in the tests were analysed. In Chap. 6, a critical analysis with reference to the concepts of sustainable development and global responsibility, both mentioned in the Swedish curriculum, was carried out with the aim of identifying how an adequate interpretation of the concept of ethical competence may be developed within RE teaching and in the national tests. In Chap. 7, a statistical analysis highlighting differential item functioning (DIF) was presented with regard to the items concerning ethics. Finally, in Chaps. 8 and 9, international perspectives on the issues and approaches presented in the foregoing six chapters were presented and elaborated on.

As was mentioned in the Preface, research regarding the national tests in RE has recently begun, and much can be expected when it comes to the development of this in the future. Some possible paths of research were mentioned. One of these involved

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focusing on results in the tests in relation to various formats of items; another was to investigate pupils' answers considered as expressions of young peoples' views on ethics and existential questions along with various conceptions about religion. A third path for research mentioned could be thought to be directed towards the question of the degree to which the results of the tests can provide indications about how the teaching in the subject of RE is carried out in Swedish schools. A fourth could be thought to be concentrated around issues related to interpretations of how teachers perform assessment and how teachers identify different qualities in answers given by pupils.

Now, all of these paths are, in one way or another, represented in this volume – and in the research project which was mentioned in the Preface: *What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School*. The purpose of this project is "to identify and elucidate varieties of conceptions of ethical competence and critically analyse and discuss them in relation to each other and in relation to ethical theory as potential educational content in compulsory school" (http://idpp.gu.se/english/Research/research_projects/what-may-be-learnt-in-ethics).

Questions and themes treated in the chapters of this volume are dealt with within the project. Its research questions are:

1. What conceptions of ethical competence can be identified in pupils' utterances (a) in national tests and (b) concerning experienced needs of ethical competence as expressed in interviews?
2. What conceptions of ethical competence can be identified in teachers' utterances in interviews regarding their commission and the goals of their teaching of national tests?
3. What conceptions of ethical competence can be identified in supranational policies and in a sample of national curricula?
4. What can be said about the identified varieties of conceptions of ethical competence in the light of each other as well as ethical theory and as potential content in contemporary compulsory school? (http://idpp.gu.se/english/Research/research_projects/what-may-be-learnt-in-ethics)

The analyses presented in the foregoing chapters, and the conclusions drawn with reference to them, have raised questions that are important to be investigated. The concept of ethical competence, applied within school contexts, is one that is of great relevance not only to a Swedish arena but to the international field where ethics and ethics education are analysed.

The conclusions drawn in the analyses in the chapters would, consequently, be of great interest for research and teaching regarding the foundations and the methods of assessment highlighted within research that is carried out with the aim of identifying challenges and problems related to assessment in ethics in a general sense.

Let me shortly sketch how further research along the four paths mentioned above is to be carried out within the ongoing research project. Such a picture captures some threads that seem to be of general interest.

The first path was described as involving a focus on results in the tests in relation to various formats of items. In several of the chapters in this book, this path has been touched upon from various angles; for example, in the second chapter, in relation to Olof Franck's analyses of what kinds of ethical competences are implied in the construction of the items or, as in the third and sixth chapters, with reference to Kristoffer Larsson's analyses of how 'critical thinking' or, to use Karin Sporre's formulation, an ability to 'think critically, in freedom and with integrity', is approached. A third angle is represented in Chap. 7 by Johan Tykesson's analysis of differential item functioning (DIF), applied to the ethical items in the tests, with results introducing perspectives and challenges relating to the questions of whether the tests could be said to favour one gender over the other and whether they disfavour pupils who are second-language speakers of Swedish.

Within the research project, these analyses will be taken further along some relevant lines. Issues regarding how ethical competence and critical thinking are approached in items in the national tests will also be highlighted in the research that lies ahead. Here it is worth emphasising that one strand to examine is the way in which ethical competence and the ability for critical thinking are described in national policy documents in various parts of the world. Such descriptions will indicate conceptions of ethical as well as of critical competence, which will probably influence the construction of tests – be it national tests or less comprehensive ones.

It is also worth mentioning that analyses of item construction in the national tests in RE may be of relevance to test construction in other subjects and vice versa. One example relating to the national tests in history is research presented in Samuelsson and Wendell (2016).

The second path for further research focusing on investigations of pupils' answers, considered as expressions of young people's views on ethics and existential questions as well as various conceptions about religion, is, in the book, specifically highlighted in Chap. 5, where Christina Osbeck presents and discusses various conceptions of ethical competence with regard to a sample of pupils' answers about the ethical concept *forgiveness* in one of the tests. The issues she examines, such as how the empirical results could be dealt with and interpreted with regard to the philosophical analysis previously presented and what pedagogical implications can be said to follow, are ones that are presently being developed within the research project. Results from a number of analyses of pupils' answers, representing a range of items and issues, have been presented at national and international conferences, and several research articles are now to be finished and submitted.[1]

It is important to develop research along this path in relation to international examinations. The national tests in RE present in certain ways a specific approach to assessment and testing, but this does not, of course, mean that they should be thought to be so unique that they lack relevance to other testing procedures within the area.

On the other hand, the research area has to be defined and structured so that a clear picture of what kinds of investigations are carried out is made transparent.

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[1] See footnotes 8–12 in the Introduction.

There is apparently a need to bring together research that examines specific topics such as pupils' answers to items on tests in ethics education in compulsory and upper secondary school[2]; competence tests carried out, for example, among staff in the areas of health and social care[3] or among students in business education[4]; and ethical codes for assessment in schools and universities.[5]

The third path for research mentioned was the question of the degree to which the results of the tests can provide indications about how teaching in the subject of RE is carried out in Swedish schools. This is a research area that is to be further examined, not least by a continuation of interviews with teachers such as those that Annika Lilja analyses in the fourth chapter in this book. More interviews have been carried out, and it is relevant to emphasise the importance of widening the scope and including international examinations of teachers' approaches to ethics education and assessment.

Finally the fourth path, concentrated around issues related to interpretations of how teachers perform assessment, how teachers identify different qualities in answers given by pupils, is one that has clear connections to the third path. There are, however, specific issues to be dealt with here. One is related to the pedagogical focus teachers may have when carrying out assessment in ethics education. Another is the extent to which teachers' conceptions of ethics, ethics education and ethical competence influence the assessment within education about ethics, morals and values. A third issue concerns questions that are treated by Julian Stern in the ninth chapter in the book, such as "What is ethics education?", "How may such education be performed and developed?" and "What is the ethical significance of assessment within ethics education?".

Stern contributes by highlighting these questions with reference to international contexts, and it is naturally important to consider such references in order to widen the perspectives on assessment in ethics education.

Such a widening of scope is also in focus in the eighth chapter of this book, where Nigel Fancourt presents an outsider's perspective on the questions and approaches highlighted in the six chapters written by the Swedish contributors. He highlights these questions and approaches with reference to wider global policy tensions and discusses demands for effective assessment, relating to neo-liberal tides and ideas. In particular, Fancourt considers "the principle of constructive alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment".

Fancourt's discussion has important consequences for the development of the research area of assessment in relation to policy-making and curriculum planning. The chapters of this book are all to be seen as parts of such a development, starting with examinations of national tests in RE in a Swedish context and taking the methods and the results of the analyses further as contributions to an international research arena.

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[2] See, for example, Grant and Matemba (2013).

[3] See, for example, Calder (2015).

[4] See, for example, Wilhelm and Czyzewski (2006).

[5] See, for example, Davison et al. (2016).

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