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## **12. INTEGRATED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE IN INTER-WORLDVIEW EDUCATION**

*A Finnish Approach*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, religious education (RE) has been a much discussed and debated school subject in European countries and at the international level. According to Robert Jackson, one of the leading researchers in the field, RE has never been discussed as widely and actively as it is now (Jackson, 2012). Nowadays, RE needs to respond to a multitude of positions in society, and views held by individuals (Boeve, 2012). Increasing migration, religious pluralism, changes in the religious landscape and secularization have created a need to profile RE anew at the national and international levels. Religion, worldviews, education, dialogue and the relations which exist between these have become important topics of debate in societies of the 21st century, and RE has a great deal of potential for promoting dialogue and increasing mutual understanding (Jackson, 2012, 2014; Weisse, 2009).

In order to teach the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary to drive dialogue forward, pedagogical tools must be developed. The need for such tools is a key issue in contemporary RE. By implementing inter-worldview<sup>1</sup> dialogue in schools, pupils from different cultural and religious backgrounds learn to critically reflect on their own thoughts and experiences relating to religious and worldview issues, and they learn to interact with others on these matters. The implementation of inter-worldview dialogue in the curriculum can increase mutual understanding and can be a way to build respect for others in a shared community, which are among the aims of the Finnish RE curriculum (see Religious Education: Non-Statutory National Framework, 2004, p. 36). The idea of inter-worldview dialogue is also present in the Finnish new core curriculum, which has been implemented in schools beginning August 2016 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). The focus of this chapter is on the possibility of organizing inter-worldview dialogue as part of RE lessons, in order to prepare the pupils, as future citizens, to live and participate in a multi-religious world while respecting different religions and worldviews. In Finnish schools, different kinds of solutions are currently implemented to organise religious education as a part of the school curriculum. The official solution is to separate the pupils on the basis of their religious affiliation, and to offer separated RE lessons. However, some schools organise integrated RE

lessons, which means that pupils from different religious backgrounds are brought together in the same classroom and are given the same lesson. We refer to the concept 'integrated RE' to indicate these kinds of solutions. We refer to the concept 'worldview education'<sup>2</sup> to indicate solutions according to which pupils from all sorts of religious affiliations, plus pupils who aren't members of any religious communities, are brought together in a single classroom. Pupils who aren't members of religious communities usually have their own subject at school, an alternative subject for religious education: secular ethics. But nowadays there are schools that integrate this subject in RE, bringing pupils who attend secular ethics lessons to the same classroom as other pupils, to be educated in worldview education lessons together.

#### THE FINNISH LANDSCAPE IN TERMS OF RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS

The Finnish society has been very homogenous and commitment to the Lutheran church has been very strong. Lutheranism has been the national, state religion for centuries and has played an important role in shaping a sense of Finnish national identity. The increasing globalization of recent years has altered the Finnish society. Diversity in Finland has often been regarded as a product of today's increased immigration, but the fact is that cultural and religious minorities (e.g. Eastern Orthodox and Muslim Tatar communities) have formed an important part of the Finnish society for centuries (Ketola, 2011). In the 1990s, when immigration to Finland began to increase, the growing diversity became a more pressing topic in societal debates. Discussions and debates about multiculturalism and the plurality of the Finnish society are more prevalent today than ever before (Ketola, 2011).

The Finnish society has become remarkably more diverse. Historically, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Greek Orthodox Church have represented the national churches. Approximately 77% of the population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and 1% adheres to the Orthodox Church. The number of immigrants and refugees has increased year after year, currently making Finland the home of over 60,000 practising Muslims. The majority of Finnish Muslims are Sunnis and an estimated 10 to 15% are Shias. Islam is also the fastest-growing religion of the last few decades (Onniskela, 2011, pp. 122-123; Martikainen, 2013).

The traditional support for Lutheranism has decreased, particularly among the young. However, the majority of Finns (approx. 77%) still officially belong to the Lutheran Church (Kuusisto, 2011; Riitaoja, Poulter, & Kuusisto, 2010). Apart from greater secularization, traditional forms of Christianity (e.g. Lutheranism) are becoming increasingly privatized, and there is also a growing interest in New Religious Movements among Finns (e.g. Amma-movement, New Hinduism). The change of the religious landscape in Finland has led to a challenge for RE, necessitating a commitment to dialogue, particularly dialogue as an important aspect of the promotion of inter-worldview education.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: THE FINNISH APPROACH

There are only a few private schools in Finland, and there is a very strong tradition of state schools. Only a couple of confessional private schools exists. Nowadays, the role played by churches and religious communities in public education is strongly diminished compared to the past. Education was separated from the Lutheran Church at the end of the 19th century (Kallioniemi & Ubani, 2012). RE is a compulsory school subject in the Finnish comprehensive school system, and religion courses in state schools have been seen as playing a part in the acquisition of civil skills. Therefore, RE has been seen as the responsibility of society in general. In recent decades, the number of RE lessons has been on the decline, and nowadays there is generally only one hour of RE taught per week in Finnish comprehensive schools (Kallioniemi & Ubani, 2012, pp. 178-179).

In Finland, RE is taught to pupils according to the religious affiliation of their parents. Schools offer education in the Lutheran, the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox denominations of Christianity. Furthermore, they offer education in secular ethics (an alternative for RE) and eleven other religions (e.g. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism). The historical roots of the current policy on RE reach back to the 1920s, and were redefined in 2003 by means of the Freedom of Religion Act. As a consequence of the 2003 reform, RE continued to be organized in conformity to the parents' religion, but the term "confession" was dropped in favour of the expression "one's own religion" (Kallioniemi & Ubani, 2012). From an international perspective (e.g. Kodelja & Bassler, 2004), the Finnish model for religious education can be characterized as a religion-based model, based on membership in a religious community, to organize RE in public schools.

From a European perspective, the Finnish approach is interesting because pupils from religious minorities are given RE about their own, familiar religion in state schools, which is not typical in many other European countries. Public education provides RE in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism for example. The Finnish model differs from the models used in other Nordic countries, too. For instance, in Sweden, the renewal of the subject took place in 1962 and the choice was made to give it a non-denominational character (Larsson, 1996, pp. 70-71). The same kind of solution was accepted in Norway, in 1997 (Haakedal, 2000, pp. 88-97).

Austria is the only European country which uses a model that is almost identical to the Finnish one. The difference between the two systems is, that in Austria the religious communities are made responsible for the preparation of the RE syllabus. They are further given the authority to formally approve RE textbooks (Pollitt, 2007, p. 19). In Finland, the RE syllabus is the result of a cooperation between the National Board of Education and religious communities, but all RE teaching is controlled, financed and enforced exclusively by the State. Religious communities are not authorized to provide RE teaching. This is a unique way of organizing RE in a state-owned school system (Davie, 2000, pp. 90-91; Kodelja & Bassler, 2004).

Despite the fact that less Finnish citizens associate themselves with any particular religion nowadays, a trend which has been on the rise for years, 91% of the pupils in comprehensive schools still participate in Lutheran RE lessons, 5%

participates in life-orientation classes and ethics courses, and 4% attends RE in other religions (Statistics Finland, 2015).

As is the case in other European countries, discussions and debates on RE and its implementation in state schools have become more intense in Finland over the recent years. The key topic under discussion is how to organize RE (or, using a more neutral term: worldview education) in an increasingly plural world (Miedema, 2006; Weisse, 2009; Bråten, 2009; Jackson, 2014). The changes in the educational landscape related to Finland's religious makeup, have emphasized the need for dialogue, in order to stimulate common understanding between different religions and worldviews. It has also been pointed out that the current organisation of RE, which involves separating the pupils, increases the likelihood of marginalizing ethnic minorities, as members of minority communities may well feel alienated from majority religion groups (Miedema, 2006; Åhs, Pouter, & Kallioniemi 2016, pp. 209-210). Changes in the way in which religions and worldviews are perceived, have given rise to a new situation: some schools have begun to change the way in which they organize RE.

#### INTEGRATED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND WORLDVIEW EDUCATION

By using the concept of 'integrated religious education,' we refer to a recent pedagogical innovation in the field of RE. This model favours a more inclusive education; it looks towards RE as a common subject for all pupils, regardless of whether they belong to certain religious communities. This new model has much in common with the Hamburger approach, summarized by the motto *Religion für Alle* (RE for All; Weisse, 2013) and the Dutch approach summarized by the motto *Leren van en met elkaar* ('Learning from and with each other'; Andree & Bakker, 1996). Over the last few years, some schools in Finland have pioneered with such an integrated model of religious/worldview education (Käpylehto, 2015; Åhs, Poulter, & Kallioniemi, 2016). The number of schools that is organizing RE lessons in this new way, is increasing.

The main idea is to partially integrate the contents of the curriculums offered by the secondary schools, which are about different religions and different types of secular ethics. In practice, this means that for most of the time pupils will be studying together in common classrooms. They will be separated in different classrooms only when the integration of the different curriculums is difficult, this will be the case mainly for classes in which the holy scripture of a certain religion is studied closely. In such cases, the lesson contents are so specific and the pupils' perspective on the subject is so influenced by their background, that conducting a dialogue becomes very difficult. Sometimes it is relevant to first have an intra-faith dialogue, in which only pupils from the same religious background will be participating. The majority of contents, including ethics and world religions, are studied together.

In worldview education and integrated RE many pedagogical strategies can be used, and this is also true for the inter-worldview dialogue which forms a constitutive part of this education. Court and Seymour (2015, pp. 521-522)

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summarize six different strategies which are partly included in integrated RE: 1. learning through contrast – learning about other religious traditions in order to learn about yourself and to respect difference; 2. learning about others – learning about other religions generates understanding and gives rise to interaction, because people live in a common, shared world; 3. learning from others – this strategy emphasizes that learning from other traditions gives the learner a sense of shared understanding and even shared histories; 4. learning with others – this strategy focuses on partnership, i.e. collaboration on joint projects, which are inviting to people because they are devoted to the common good; 5. learning to deepen one's own faith – this strategy revolves around deepening one's own faith and religious identity; and 6. learning to achieve spiritual growth – this strategy focuses on the search for connections between religious phenomena, the ability to see such connections, and the gaining of insight. The implementation of these strategies requires the availability of sufficient time to put them in motion, and a variety of resources.

Not all of these strategies are suitable for use in a public-school environment, however, due to perspective on education that is dominant in state-owned schools – some strategies presuppose the educational approach held by the religious communities. The main difference between the two is that in the case of public Finnish schools, RE is kept non-confessional, with all the relevant restrictions, whereas this is not the case for education offered by religious communities (Leganger-Krogstad, 2011; Court & Seymour, 2015, p. 519).

Jackson (2014) has reflected on the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for a successful dialogue to develop within RE. These include: respect for a person and his or her right to have a particular religious or non-religious viewpoint, openness to learn about different religions, the willingness to suspend judgement, and empathy. These attitudes can be encouraged by, for example, nurturing sensitivity in relation to the variety of religious and non-religious convictions that exist, promoting dialogue between people from different backgrounds, addressing sensitive and controversial issues, and combating stereotypes and prejudice. According to Jackson (2014), the learning environment should be perceived as safe, and the role of the teacher is that of a moderator, so that conflicts may be avoided. Teachers must give accurate information about different religious traditions to their pupils, and they need to be aware of tensions which may occur among groups of pupils, due to their religious background.

#### WORLDVIEW EDUCATION IS ABOUT HAVING ENCOUNTERS WITH REAL-WORLD PEOPLE

Worldview education has an important role to play in the search for new educational methods that will advance broad social transformation. It carries with it the potential to initiate a paradigm shift from dominance, exclusiveness and violence to equity, inclusiveness and peace.

Integrated RE offers the possibility to practice worldview education, especially because of the classroom context, i.e. during worldview education the classroom is

filled with pupils from different worldview and faith backgrounds. Integrated RE, with its focus on inter-worldview dialogue, gives participants the opportunity to learn how to present their own perceptions and points of view with regard to faiths and worldview matters. This paves the way for deep encounters with non-religious – agnostic or even atheistic – partners who are not without faith, but whose faith is expressed in terms of reason, truth, evolution, science, or some other entity.

Integrated RE and worldview education are closely linked. Many approaches which are specifically developed for integrated RE can be used in worldview education as well. They are not one and the same, however: integrated RE focuses on religious worldviews, worldview education on the other hand addresses elements of both religious and non-religious worldviews. Wherever educators develop the concept of worldview education and translate it effectively into teaching practice, sensitivity to different worldviews is a prerequisite; this ought to permeate the school context.

It should be noted that many aspects of interfaith education – and many of the pedagogical approaches to this kind of education – have been developed with the idea of promoting interfaith dialogue in spiritual contexts, in religious communities. The school context, however, differs significantly from religious contexts and the starting point in schools and in religious contexts is very different. In religious contexts, the participants in interfaith dialogue are usually members of religious communities. In school contexts, the pupils and their families may be members of religious communities, but this does not necessarily hold for all of them. Or, in spite of their family's belief system, the pupils might not be particularly religious or spiritually minded, they may not have developed any religious, spiritual or non-spiritual identity of note, and thus would not identify themselves as members of some religious or non-religious group. Such elements should be borne in mind when adapting approaches that have been designed for interfaith education and interfaith dialogue to worldview education and in inter-worldview dialogue.

Eboo Patel (2016) has referred to interaction and relations when defining the concept 'interfaith.' He sees the 'inter' in interfaith to stand for the interaction between people who orient themselves to religion in different ways. The 'faith' aspect of interfaith stands for how people relate to their religious and ethical traditions. So, for Patel, interfaith is, first, about the way in which our interactions with those who are different have an impact on how we relate to our religious and ethical traditions, and, second, about how our relationships with our traditions have an impact on our interactions with those who are different from us. According to this definition, worldview education is about having encounters with real-world people, and about familiarizing ourselves with the distinct way in which they express their religiosity. A type of worldview education which concerns itself with how abstract religious systems are interacting, misses out on such opportunities however. So, a concrete classroom environment provides pupils with opportunities to exchange their ideas, to share their personal experiences, discover the other, and gives them the possibility to challenge their own perceptions.

INTER-WORLDVIEW EDUCATION PREPARES FOR DIALOGUE

Inter-worldview education has grown out of the interfaith movement, a movement with a progressive and activist agenda (Braybrooke, 2013). Inter-worldview dialogue is not limited to a process of learning, i.e. learning how to live together in spite of religious and cultural differences, it also involves a process that provides opportunities to take constructive action, which can lead to positive change.

As interfaith literacy within the interfaith movement developed, organizers began to turn their attention to the most effective methods and pedagogies to teach others about different belief systems, spiritual traditions and non-religious traditions (Braybrooke, 2013). Inter-worldview education now seeks to equip learners with knowledge about the histories, practices, beliefs and values of various world religions and worldviews. While teaching, the basic objective is to seek out and to compare common positions, around which the variety of faiths, spiritual traditions and non-religious traditions can develop common thinking and action towards common goals. Inter-worldview education prepares pupils for interfaith and inter-worldview dialogue (Kamaara, 2010).

The aim of inter-worldview education is to equip pupils with tools and competences, so as to allow them to engage in inter-worldview dialogue. Leonard Swidler (1987) argues that dialogue serves three goals:

1. To gain ever more profound knowledge about yourself, and to enrich your appreciation of the faith and worldview tradition to which you belong.
2. To gain ever more authentic knowledge about the other, and to gain a friendly understanding of others as they truly are and not as they are caricatured.
3. To live an ever fuller human life, and to establish a more solid foundation for community life and for joint action by adherents of various faith and worldview traditions.

All these aspects are very transformative.

Inter-worldview dialogue and cooperation includes a vision of society in which individuals are both self-determining (they are able to gain sufficient religious literacy to process out the main religious stereotypes, for instance) and interdependent (they are capable of interacting dialogically with others). Worldview education involves actors that engage in this learning process to attain the goals of dialogue. Moreover, due to its own dynamics, this process generates self-determination, authenticity and the interconnectedness of people.

Inter-worldview education incorporates elements of experimental education, which provides the learner with an experience and offers assistance in reflecting on that experience. Thus, for example, youth interfaith educationalists around the world have drawn on the experiential learning movement that began with the philosophical work of John Dewey (1916) in the early years of the 20th century.

If inter-worldview education is seen as very similar to experiential education, it can also be described as a practice-oriented process, and on this basis, the process in question must be analysed or personally reflected on in order to achieve personal and individual growth (Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). The learning process allows participants to reflect on different cultures, faith traditions, ideas and ways of thinking. It has also been developed to help participants with openness to others,

nurturing their inner selves, and with responding better to the needs of their immediate environment. It is a cognitive, affective and experiential process that has the potential to transform attitudes, and the ultimate potential to promote more inclusive, cohesive and peaceful communities (Engebretson, 2009). To pursue this goal, trust needs to be developed between participants, an evolution which requires self-awareness, teambuilding and teamwork, personal dignity, and individual and group problem-solving skills (Smith et al., 1992). These are also the required elements for successful inter-worldview dialogue.

Interfaith and inter-worldview education both have their giving and receiving elements. As Leonard Swidler points out, the primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in one's perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly. Swidler has defined seven stages in the interfaith learning process (1997). Knowledge about this multi-stage process can be used to deepen the relationship which grows through interfaith dialogue offered in the classroom. These stages can also be demarcated during worldview dialogue. They describe the potential for transformative change contained in dialogue: 1. Encountering of radical difference; 2. Crossing over, letting go and entering the world of the other; 3. Inhabiting and experiencing the world of the other; 4. Crossing back with expanded knowledge; 5. Dialogical/critical awakening, a radical paradigm shift; 6. Global awakening, the paradigm shift matures; 7. Personal and far-reaching transformation of life and behaviour. These statements summarize the learning processes which we ought to be on the lookout for, in teaching. Most importantly, participants in such a dialogue will not only be energized as a group and as individuals, they will also be able to inspire others (Swidler, 1999). Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2007) stresses the importance of such elements of learning, and notes that we may hopefully expect that with this kind of interfaith dialogue, the participants will, in some way, behave differently afterwards. Inter-worldview education can have strong transformative effects on individual participants, causing shifts in consciousness that fundamentally change the way they understand themselves and other people, in positive ways (Rautionmaa, 2016).

The pedagogy of worldview education must go both ways and must be open. Rules need to be defined that allow people to speak for themselves. Safety must be provided so that those who have previously been excluded are now welcomed (Patel, 2010).

Worldview education requires at the very least the creation of an infrastructure which makes it possible to meet and conduct a dialogue in a supportive, non-judgemental environment that supports respect and trust. Preconditional for inter-worldview dialogue is the full and equal participation of pupils with different religions and worldviews in the classroom, followed by the subsequent, equally unlimited participation of such groups in society.

Agneta Ucko (2008, p. 12) has pointed out that "mutual respect is significant in the sense that it affirms differences and does not confuse 'difference' with 'wrong.' Neither does it allow differences that are natural and legitimate to devolve into divisions." Researchers into inter-worldview dialogue (e.g. Court & Seymoure,



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2015) have noted that mutual respect grows when an increase in mutual understanding and appreciation of differences and similarities takes place. Ucko argues that “mutual respect helps to build relationships despite our differences, and helps in the process of mutual correction, enrichment and self-criticism” (Ucko, 2008, p. 12).

Getting to know one another, and building a level of trust and mutual respect that cuts across different faith and worldview traditions, takes more than a single encounter. It requires a series of dialogical encounters over time to develop a shared vision for the common good. Regular, on-going dialogue between the participants is essential to support the learning process, in creating opportunities for pupils to share their insights, and by giving them continuous scope to get to know each other more deeply.

#### TELLING STORIES AS A WAY OF PRACTISING DIALOGUE

One learning method in inter-worldview education is storytelling. The goal of storytelling is to foster personal relationships among a diverse group of pupils. By means of this device, the bonds of interfaith and inter-worldview trust and respect begin to grow, or are deepened, among pupils.

According to Eboo Patel (2008), storytelling is a particularly strong method when working with young people. It becomes a tool for sharing, and thus for promoting understanding. Storytelling provides a bridge which enables people to overcome some of the previously mentioned obstacles, by opening up the possibility for a different kind of conversation. Being listened to, listening authentically to the experiences of others, and learning about profoundly personal matters which are experienced as positive and very meaningful, creates a potential for positive change, especially in the relationship between people who have formed negative stereotypes about each other.

The philosopher and theologian Martin Buber (1962) believed that storytelling has the capacity to bring about healing, and that it is, in itself, a sacred action. When participants relate to one another on this level of shared humanity, they have an opportunity to become witnesses of each other’s lives. They start to be caretakers of each other’s stories.

In this process, participants are witnesses to the lives of others, who are their neighbours. They can begin to work through a set of questions. This activity falls under the scope of the cognitive approach. Who are we to each other? What is our responsibility towards – our connection to – the stories of people whose lives have been very different from our own? What have we learned from each other? How have the stories of others changed me? How can we tell each other’s stories faithfully? (Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, 2001).

When faced with participants who show their feelings, it becomes especially clear that such an encounter differs from a scholarly debate, where the discussing of doctrines or the comparison of texts is at the heart of it all. Storytelling is often a path to opening up new possibilities. It challenges listeners to look at matters from the perspective of someone else. In many cases, when participants represent their

personal faith and convictions, this approach challenges them to recognize what is of particular importance in their own religion or ideology, instead of further allowing it to be clouded by cultural contexts. Encounters and cooperation can lead people to put the emphasis on ethics, instead of focusing on doctrine.

#### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have presented the Finnish societal context, followed by an overview of approaches to integrated RE and inter-worldview education, whereby we promoted an inter-worldview dialogue in classrooms populated by pupils/students with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Inter-worldview education, which promotes understanding between adherents of different religious and non-religious worldviews, can be seen as a challenging enterprise in the Finnish school context. The need for mutual understanding and reciprocal respect is obvious in our current, globalized world. A plurality of changes in societies – which include secularization, the rise of fundamentalism, and the emergence of new religious and spiritual movements – increase the need for inter-worldview education. Furthermore, the changes in the population structures of European societies, caused in part by the influx of migrants and asylum seekers, make it necessary to give pupils the tools to enter into dialogue with people who belong to a plurality of faith communities.

In many countries, introducing inter-worldview dialogue in education is at a very early phase. There is an obvious lack of theoretical reflection about what inter-worldview dialogue involves at the school level, and further research is required. In this chapter, we presented some ideas on the implementation of new educational methods and the application of research in the Finnish context, which may prove useful in international contexts.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Inter-worldview dialogue is a part of integrated religious education. It takes place when pupils from different worldview and faith backgrounds participate in the same lesson. We use the concept 'inter-worldview' because it emphasises the dialogue between different faiths and spiritual and secular traditions more clearly than the concept 'worldview dialogue.'
- <sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we use the term worldview education to refer to the RE and secular ethics courses given in Finland, since this is an inclusive term, which highlights both the religious and nonreligious worldviews of the students attending the classes (Åhs, Poulter, & Kallioniemi, 2016).

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