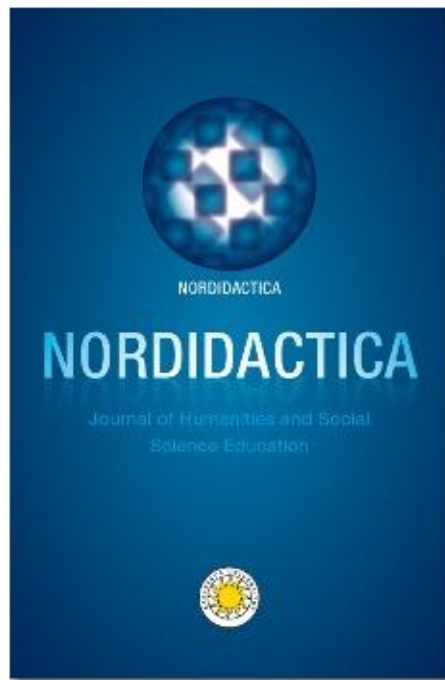# Nordidactica

- Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education

2015:2

Action research and development work in religion and world view education – comparing communities of practice and cooperative networks

Prof. Dr. Elisabet Haakedal, University of Agder, Norway.

Abstract: In this article two cases of action research in religion and world view education are compared. A third, smaller case, in which the author has been involved, is referred to initially and in the final discussion in order to enrich the comparison. Three clusters of themes are compared: 1) the institutional basis, economic resources, leadership and administration of the research projects, 2) the development of, references to and use of didactic approaches / pedagogical models, and 3) research design and methods. Methodologically the comparison is based on a combination of empathetic and critical hermeneutics. Theoretically, ideas of interactive and/or action research, learning and development work are preferred to ideas separating academic systematic research practice from the practical knowledge and mastering of pedagogical methods. It is argued that interactive work promoting proximity of practices, i.e. seeking to create a bridging and complementing mutuality between the sub-communities of primary and secondary education on the one hand and the sub-communities of tertiary education and research on the other, is the best way forward.

About the author: Elisabet Haakedal is Professor of religious education at the Faculty of Humanities and Education at the University of Agder, Norway. Her field of research is religions / philosophies of life and education in the compulsory school. She has published several studies, historical and contemporary, on pupils' texts from religion(s) and world view(s) education. She chaired the Norwegian RE-research Forum (Norsk religionspedagogisk forskerforum) from 2011 to 2014.

In 2011 Inger Margrethe Tallaksen and I at the University of Agder (UiA), and two lower secondary school religious education (RE)[1] teachers, established a local cooperative network, working together on an RE project. The eventual title was *Oral skills in RE on the lower secondary stage and in teacher education for stage 5-10: Searching for good learning strategies and assessment practices*. Right from the start in everyday speech and writing, the project was called the RE pilot. The reason for this was its initial context of funding. Through the RE pilot, we planned to contribute to a larger research project, called *Big words and invisible skills? Researching and developing oral literacy in religious education*.[2] However, the research application of this project did not obtain funding from The Research Council of Norway's PRAKUT program in April 2012.[3] The larger research project may be seen as an attempt to follow up the two main cases of action research presented in this article, i.e. the REDCo project based at the University of Warwick (UW) with Robert Jackson as the director (until October 2012)[4] and the ROM project based at the University of Stavanger (UiS) with Geir Skeie as a leading initiator.[5] The small RE pilot at UiA will only be referred to in the final comparative discussion in order to reflect more deeply on some challenges regarding action research.

Theme, key concepts and research questions

The introductory contextual details of the RE pilot at UiA, as well as the UW and the UiS projects, point to the theme of the article, which is a comparison of practice

---

[1] In this article I use religious education (RE) as the name of an ordinary required subject in the Norwegian primary and lower secondary school. I also use 'religion(s) and world view(s) education' as a synonym of RE. Since 2008 the Norwegian name of the compulsory school subject has been *Religion, livssyn og etikk*, with the acronym of RLE. Translated into English this is *Religion, philosophy of life [or world view] and ethics*.

[2] The Norwegian name of the local project was *Muntlighet i RLE-faget på ungdomstrinnet og i GLU 5-10: Jakten på gode læringsstrategier og vurderingspraksiser*. The network was supported for two years by the Department for Teacher Education at UiA, receiving relatively small means (77500 NOK) for a research and development project. Tallaksen (2013) published a short report on a sub-project, while I presented a preliminary version of this article at the 12th Nordic Conference on Religious Education (NCRE) in 2013, at the University of Iceland.

[3] The main partners in the larger project were Geir Skeie at the University of Stavanger (UiS), Geir Afdal at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Sidsel Lied at the University College of Hedmark, Kåre Fuglseth at the University of Nordland, and Elisabet Haakedal at the University of Agder. Skeie wrote the application, as UiS was chosen as its base. He was mainly assisted by Afdal in the writing process, but all of us contributed in the planning. In the application, the project was partly presented as a continuation of the ROM project and referred to several REDCo publications (Skeie 2010a, Ipgrave, Jackson, O'Grady 2009). See below for REDCo and ROM.

[4] See WRERU's web site (http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/), accessed 09.07.2014.

[5] The UiS web site (http://www.uis.no/, accessed 09.07.2014) informs that Skeie is granted leave of absence for parts of his position as professor at the UiS. From 2010 Skeie has had a permanent position as professor at the University of Stockholm with responsibility as leader of the research and the education of researchers at the *Centre for Teaching and Learning in the Humanities* (*Centrum för de humanistiska ämnernas didaktik*, CeHum).

oriented approaches in the research (and development) field of religion(s) and world view(s) education. Three clusters of themes are dealt with: 1) research frames and conditions, 2) subject didactic approaches or models and 3) research designs and methods.

Before presenting the article's specific research questions, I will briefly comment on a few conceptual categories which will be used later in the discussions, i.e. the concepts of 'research and development work', 'action research', 'community of practice', and 'cooperative network'.

The article is based on the presumption that there is no empirical basis for an absolute distinction between 'research' and 'development work'. However, the article acknowledges the ideal of inter-subjectivity in publicly documented 'research and development work'.[6] The ideal for tertiary education's introductory academic literature in a certain field is that it should be based on research and development work by the author(s) as well as showing references to and discussions with other substantial contributions in the field.[7] Here, inter-subjectivity does not refer to a total agreement of research statements and results but to an acknowledgment of the systematic search for such agreements through persistent research questions, aims and designs.

Action research has been undertaken in several fields of practice in modern societies since the middle of the 20th century in order to get beyond the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice' (Svensson and Nielsen 2006) and to ensure the interrelated relevance of research and development work. The concept of 'cyclic actions' (O'Grady 2009, p. 34, Hiim 2010, p. 19f) in action research will be dealt with below (under theory and methods). It represents the idea of a constantly learning community (or institution) where new questions are formulated and new solutions (actions) are tried out. Here it is sufficient to establish an epistemological link between the academic characteristics of action research and the concept of 'community of practice' which is a recognized term with a specific meaning within learning theory (Lave and Wenger 1991). In principle each member of a community of practice will have a particular sub-question which he or she will handle through cyclic actions and write about. In this article, a 'cooperative network', as used above about the group behind the RE pilot, is a concept overlapping with a community of practice but without the strict principle of individual sub-questions (and published results). Similarities and differences as well as advantages and disadvantages connected with the use of 'communities of practice' and 'cooperative network' will be discussed towards the end of the article.

Those involved in RE teacher education research have a double academic interest in common: critically to research RE in a wide sense, and, with democratic loyalty, to keep up a politically based education system, including its 'religion(s) and world

---

[6] In this article I will not define this double concept. I only claim that to be contextually relevant 'research' and 'development' need to be included in an interactive relation.

[7] See Lied (2012, p. 18) and her references to Norwegian official, governing documents.

view(s) education'.[8] Against this background I have chosen the most central publications from two RE action research projects, the British REDCo project, and the Norwegian ROM project,[9] as the main empirical basis for the article's research questions and comparative discussions. My research questions are:

1. What are the main similarities and differences between the REDCo and the ROM projects regarding institutional basis, economic resources, leadership and administration?

2. What are the significant similarities and differences between the basic didactic approaches or models for RE as a common school subject in these two action research projects?

3. What are the similarities and differences between the two projects regarding research design and methods? To what degree do they apply the concept of community of practice in the same way?

4. If the REDCo and ROM projects on the one hand and the RE pilot on the other are comparable, what differences and similarities should be emphasized in order to reflect on further progress within practice oriented RE and RE teacher research?

I do not pretend to know all Norwegian, let alone Nordic or European action research projects in RE. In fact, this article and another text based on the RE pilot (Haakedal 2014 work in progress) represent the start of my academic writing as a result of working with RE school teachers in addition to writing up research after having observed and interviewed them (Haakedal 2004).

Main source material and aim

The article has historical as well as contemporary aspects, not least because it uses selected publications from a certain period of British and Norwegian RE.[10] Here the titles of the major (collections of) texts are emphasized:

- *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach* (Ipgrave, Jackson, O'Grady 2009, an anthology by ten authors)
- *Religious education and diversity. Space for learning in religion, philosophy of life and ethics* (my translation of the Norwegian title by Skeie 2010a, an anthology by nine authors)

---

[8] There is no consensus about the balancing of critical academic freedom and support for a nation state's educational and academic institution. Still, every member of an academic community has to relate to the competition for research resources, e.g. provided by the research programs planned and announced by The Research Council of Norway (cf. PRAKUT). 'Religion(s) and world view(s) education' – as a term for a sub-field in primary and secondary education – is an example of dissension, as is 'religious education'.

[9] I originally planned to include the cooperative research done at another Norwegian institution, Hedmark University College, with Sidsel Lied (e.g. 2012) as a leading member. Also RE action research initiated by RE colleagues at Oslo University College (Nicolaisen 2007) could be included. For space reasons this is not done.

[10] The years 2008-2014 represent the six first years of the Norwegian RLE-period. See note 1.

- *A subject didactic study of trying out an interpretive and culturally aware approach to Religion, philosophy of life and ethics education* (my translation of the Norwegian title by Husebø 2013a, an article based PhD thesis)

The two first of these publications are anthologies written by the members of two communities of practice, based respectively at the UW (the REDCo project) and the UiS (the ROM project). The UiS community consisted of two sub units, both with Geir Skeie as the leader. Øystein L. Johannessen (2010) was a research member of the first sub unit, and Dag Husebø (2013a, p.12) a research member of the second.

The aim of the article is both critical and constructive. By comparing different aspects of the action research projects and publications I will, in the final section, be better able to reflect on current subject didactic discourses, especially in Norway. Thus I take part in a normative discussion about progress in the academic research and development field of RE.

Theory and method

In this article and in the main source material, questions of theory and method are extremely interrelated. Action research as a broad practice oriented tradition is central in the publications from the REDCo and the ROM projects. Two conceptual distinctions will here be referred to in order to underline the breadth and the development in action research methodology. First, there is the distinction between 'action research' and 'action learning' (Tiller 1999 in Steen-Olsen and Eikseth 2009, p. 18). This differentiation is based on a related distinction between the role of a researcher and the role of a so called practitioner. Action research in this sense is built on the premise that the researcher takes an active part as an external expert in an interventional change in the studied field,[11] e.g. a school. Action learning then refers to the field members' continuous self-developing, learning and reflexive processes in order to establish the agreed change. The wish for change in this case will have originated in the relevant field of practice, i.e. among the practitioners. The concept of '(cyclic) action' refers to a problem solution arrived at by the practitioners and the researcher(s) in cooperation.[12] The partnership between researcher and practitioners is here (with a reference to T. Tiller) called a researching partnership (Steen-Olsen and Eikseth, p. 19). However, the main responsibility for the validity of the action research lies with the researcher. The strength of an action research project is seen through the

---

[11] The concept of 'field' is not defined in this text. However, the authors (Steen-Olsen and Eikseth 2009, p. 23) emphasize the concept of reflexivity and refer to works by P. Bourdieu (and L. J. D. Wacquant).

[12] In a cyclic model of action research, the problem solution represents stage 3. Stage 1 represents a need for change or a stated development question; stage 2 – a historical and current situation analysis; stage 4 – the introduction of a model for change; stage 5 – the implementation of the model; stage 6 – the participants' reflection on the model; and stage 7 – the consolidation of the new practice. See Steen-Olsen and Eikseth (2009, p. 20) referring to an action research model by Y. Engeström.

degree of reflexivity and critical self-analysis shown by the authors and the degree of transparency of the processes which are described in the research publications (pp. 23f).

The second conceptual distinction refers to 'action research' as something other than 'interactive research', a differentiation which points to values and normative aspects in the development of the broad tradition of action research. The concept of interactive research particularly underlines a democratic principle which the research (and learning) process should be based on. Interactive research includes an element of shared analytical efforts and shared learning by those involved throughout the cyclic movements in the total cooperative process. However, the distinction between action research and interactive research may seem to be utopian, according to L. Svensson and K. A. Nielsen (2006, p. 14).

The concept of community of practice, which is central to the REDCo and the ROM projects, also seems to include some of the normative dilemmas connected with the distinction between action research and interactive research. To put it simply, one may ask who takes the initiative to establish a community of practice and who decides the criteria for becoming and staying a member of the community throughout the whole process. In turn, the same question could be asked about the members of each individual sub-project. Also, there is the question of ownership and handling of documentations from the (sub-) processes, as well as related research ethics. The idea of a community of practice is rooted in theories of social learning by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991 in Husebø 2013a, pp. 61-64). The various interpretations in the relevant RE projects of the concepts of 'situated learning' and of 'legitimate peripheral learning', coming from Lave and Wenger's theories, will be discussed below.

The methodology of the article may be called critically reflexive hermeneutics (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). In my studies of RE teachers and school / academic culture I am influenced by (but not uncritical of) the competitive aspect (Haakedal 2005) visible in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'field':

> *In analytic terms, a field is a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (dominions, subordination, homology etc.).* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 97)

Applied to educational institutions, field competition is shown, e.g., through competing (implicit) positions regarding epistemology and teachers' professional practice. Based on qualitative empirical research, I would claim that there are similarities as well as differences between the positions of researchers in tertiary (teacher) education and those of school teachers (Haakedal 2007). The comparisons in the article are based on a combination of empathetic hermeneutics (the ideal of fairness to the matter as represented in the source material) and critical hermeneutics

(questioning basic assumptions and omissions detected in the source material). When researching field practices where one has been or is actively involved, the principle of methodological transparency is particularly relevant.[13]

In this article I will only cover phenomena and aspects relating to the chosen themes and research questions. After presentations and discussions related to each of the questions, I will sum up my reflections and conclude the article by adding some positioning comments.

Research frames for two cases of RE action research

In this section I will compare the securing of RE research frames shown (often indirectly) by the initiators of RE action research at UW and UiS. To a certain degree this will involve describing historical aspects of the careers of the persons involved. I am, however, not so much interested in biographical details as in what the publications tell about the establishing and maintaining of professional connections and creative use of resources.

UW's REDCo project – as RE action research

Here I will focus on professor Robert Jackson and his colleagues' roles as bridge builders between RE research and RE practice at UW. Jackson is research consultant to the *Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit* (WRERU). From the establishment of WRERU in 1994 he was its director until 2012.[14] Jackson's central position in the British and international field of RE research is well documented by Oddrun M. H. Bråten (2013, p. 71). All the researchers at WRERU work with the intersection of religions and education. However, not all of them took part in the REDCo project (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady 2009).

At UW, Jackson worked closely with Judith Everington who for many years was the main lecturer for and researcher of students preparing to be RE teachers in secondary school.[15] In 2010 she gained a PhD in RE from UW. Julia Ipgrave, Kevin O'Grady and Nigel Fancourt have all obtained PhD degrees through WRERU, supervised by Jackson. O'Grady and Fancourt were secondary school RE teachers while taking part in the action research group.[16] These five, and a small number of

---

[13] Epistemologically I lean on a moderate social constructivist position, ontologically I rely on 'invisible reality', which to a certain degree may be observed and spoken and written about (e.g. signs of relationships and friendships, and feelings). I value openness, solidarity and mutual respect in professional and personal relationships, although I am realistic regarding the pervasiveness of competition almost on all levels of human interaction.

[14] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/aboutus/staff/rj/, accessed 09.07.2014. During this time Jackson (co-)supervised the production of three PhD theses written by Norwegians (Sissel Østberg, Oddrun M. H. Bråten and Lars L. Eriksen, now Iversen). Professor L. Francis is the director of WRERU from 2012.

[15] Jackson and Everington were both in the team of authors behind the 'Bridges to Religions' series, offered as resource material for RE teachers (see the reference list in Jackson 2009).

[16] Jackson was also an RE school teacher for some years before entering tertiary education and research.

other teacher educators, RE teachers and a religious education adviser, all with strong connections to WRERU and UW's Institute of Education, established a community of practice in 2006 in order to contribute to the supranational RE research project called REDCo (*Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European countries*, cf. Jackson, Miedema, Weisse and Willaime 2007). It was funded by the European Commission from 2006-2009 and emphasized an exploration of the role of religion in education in a religious diverse society. The book by WRERU's community of practice was seen as the British main contribution to REDCo. Julia Ipgrave describes the aims of the community's 'practitioner-researchers'[17]:

> *The overall aims of their activities have been to enhance their students' understanding of the religious lives of others and their personal responses to these, and to enhance their own understanding of their students' learning processes.* (Ipgrave 2009, p. 14)

The first chapter (Jackson 2009) of the book makes it clear that 'the interpretive approach' to RE (Jackson 1997) was basic to the REDCo project and to the WRERU community of practice. The second chapter, by Kevin O'Grady (2009), presents the theory and main concepts of action research basic to the community. The book's second part (chapters 3-9) contains the individual sub-project results from seven of the original eleven members of the community. The third part includes joint reflections by the editors on the members' application of the interpretive approach and action research, as well as a narrative text by Judith Everington (2009) summing up the community's common 'journey'. This text bears witness to 'turning points' showing the importance of finding funds for residential meetings with time for socializing as well as presentations of texts and responses, and a strong link between the action research projects of WRERU and of the UiS group (p. 185f). The fourth and final part of the book includes chapters by Nigel Fancourt and Geir Skeie, both commenting on the work by the WRERU community of practice as part of the bigger REDCo project.

The ROM project at UiS – funding, leadership and PhD supervision

Geir Skeie was the leader of the ROM project[18] at the UiS with funding from The Research Council of Norway from 2006 to 2010. In a text called *Religious education and diversity. Space for learning in religion, philosophy of life and ethics* (my translation), he gives the background for the project and refers briefly to previous cooperation with RE researches from other countries, e.g. Robert Jackson.[19] Two

---

[17] Using the term 'practitioner-researcher' seems a way of reducing differences between a 'researcher' and a 'practitioner'.

[18] ROM refers to the title of Skeie 2010a. As an acronym, ROM alludes to the fact that the Norwegian word *rom* refers both to room and space.

[19] Skeie 2010c, pp. 126f. Skeie and Jackson have known each other professionally since the early 1990s. They probably first met at the 8th ISREV (the *International Seminar on Religious Education and Values*) session in 1992 in Canada. They were both members of the leading group of the REDCo project, with researchers from eight European countries. The REDCo

communities of practice were established under the ROM project. One (here called 'the first') had nine experienced RE primary and lower secondary school teachers as main members in addition to Skeie and Øystein Lund Johannessen (Skeie 2010b, p. 10). Another (here called 'the second') was led by Skeie and his UiS colleague Dag Husebø and included five RE student teachers and two primary school based teacher educators supervising the students during their internship period (Husebø 2013a, p. 3, 9, 12).

In the ROM book edited by Skeie (2010a), most of the chapters are written by the RE teachers, reporting on the progress and results of their own sub-projects. One chapter is written by Johannessen (2010), referring to earlier cooperative research (Johannessen 2008) with RE teachers. Many of these joined the first ROM project.[20] The other main publication (so far) from the ROM project is Dag Husebø's PhD thesis (2013a) supervised by Skeie.

Geir Skeie is a RE researcher, research leader, supervisor, administrator and educator. His PhD thesis (Skeie 1998) has been influential in RE research both in Norway and in Europe (Bråten 2013, pp. 60-62). Skeie has many years of experience from RE teacher education at the University College of Bodø[21] and at UiS. This is important for Husebø (2012, p. 456) who underlines the fact that the work of the (second) ROM community of practice "was carried out in the subject RLE, integrated into the general teacher education at the University of Stavanger in 2008/09."[22] In the campus based RE sessions of subject didactics, the five student teachers attached to ROM were part of a larger group of RE student teachers, doing their 3rd (or 4th) year of teacher education. In Husebø's PhD thesis, it is a little confusing that he sometimes writes about the ROM project without specifications and sometimes about the work of the second community of practice. Although it is not quite clear, it seems that all the members of the two ROM communities visited the WRERU community of practice in February / spring 2009 on a study trip and that this meeting with the originators of 'the interpretive approach' (Jackson, Everington and professor Eleanor Nesbitt) was of

---

project has been an arena for PhD candidates, supervised by the leaders, to present papers at conferences and seminars and to get texts published (Husebø 2013a, p. iii). In this process, the establishment of a research series, called *Religious Diversity and Education in Europe*, by the publishing company of Waxmann, was essential, edited by C. Bakker, H.-G. Heimbrock, R. Jackson, G. Skeie and W. Weisse.

[20] Johannessen is (per August 2014) finishing his PhD thesis based (at least partly) on his research as a member of the first ROM community of practice with Skeie as his supervisor.

[21] This university college has since become the University of Nordland.

[22] In Husebø's longer overarching PhD text (2013a, p. 10), he writes (my translation): "The actions were observed and documented by the community of practice, and after a common process of reflection new actions were planned and implemented. Regarding us subject teachers [i.e. Skeie and Husebø, my comment], this took place in our ordinary practice as lecturers on the part of subject pedagogy [or subject didactics, my comment] of the study of RLE in the teacher education [...]". Husebø also informs that "19 hours of video recordings from RLE teaching at the University Campus led by subject teachers" were produced (p. 24, my translation). Skeie has told me (in a conversation I had with him in July 1914) that he and Husebø always shared the lecturing and the communication with the students through the use of dialogue during these campus based sessions.

central importance too each of the communities.[23] Husebø was engaged as a researcher attached to the ROM project from 2006 to 2010 and has a permanent position at UiS. Johannessen is a full time researcher at the independent *Centre for Intercultural Communication* in Stavanger. Their understanding of the combination of 'the Interpretive Approach in RE', action research and community of practice will be discussed further below.

Comparing funding, research connections, leadership and supervision

Although there are differences in scale and funding,[24] a comparison of the RE research frames of the chosen source material highlights the importance of a solid research reputation and skills connected with the building of long lasting research relationships. As Bråten points out (2013, p. 61), the early connections between the WRERU academic community and Skeie's early RE academic network efforts coincided. The link answered mutual interests and, as will be seen in the next paragraph, were based on quite similar values and understandings of RE in European schools showing an increasing diversity with regard to culture, religions and world views. Without the personal academic and social entrepreneur skills shown by Jackson and Skeie, the link between WRERU's REDCo project and the ROM project would probably not have been forged. Jackson and Skeie have generated PhD projects and secured funds for realisations by (younger) colleagues whom they have supervised. Jackson has cooperated with full time permanent employees at UW's Institute of Education regarding educational research and pedagogical development. I have not found similar cooperation between Skeie and his permanent full time colleagues at UiS's Department of Cultural Studies and Languages.[25]

Basic values and epistemologies in quite similar RE approaches

The comparison in this section concentrates on the use and interpretation of preferred pedagogical approaches to RE as a school subject in the chosen source material. Above I have underlined the strong links between UW's REDCo project and the ROM project at UiS. For this reason I will emphasize the position of the 'interpretive approach to RE' in the two projects.

The 'interpretive approach to RE' in action research at UW

There are several indicators that the Norwegian RE research field has received strong influences from British RE thinking and research, particularly since the 1990s

---

[23]Everington 2009, p. 185, Johannessen and Husebø 2010, p. 42, Skeie 2010c, pp. 139ff, Husebø 2012, p. 463.

[24] See Bråten (2013, pp. 63, note 72) for a discussion of the main differences regarding ways and sources for the funding of RE research in England and Norway.

[25] Dag Husebø has (per August 2014) a permanent full time general position at the Faculty of Humanities at UiS but no affiliation with the Department of Cultural Studies and Languages. This is most probably due to the lack of vacancies within this Department.

(Skeie 2004). Bengt-Ove Andreassen (2012, pp. 82, 89, 91ff, 117) refers without critical comments to 'the interpretive approach' (Jackson 1997) developed by WRERU members. I will briefly review the main aims, contents and basic values of this approach, starting with the WRERU project.

Jackson states that when first developed, the interpretive approach had the British school subject of RE as its context, a subject "primarily concerned with helping pupils to gain a critical and reflexive understanding of religions" (Jackson 2009, p. 21). Briefly reporting on the theoretical background of the approach, he refers to the fields of comparative religious studies (W. C. Smith) and ethnography (C. Geertz), and not least to the discourse about biased, power related constructs of reality (e.g. in the academic tradition of 'comparative religion') with a particular reference to the philosopher of culture and literature, Edward Said (pp. 22-23). The basic theoretical concepts in the interpretive approach are representation, interpretation, reflexivity and edification. With regard to the concept of representation (pp. 24f), the main content is a three level distinction between a 'religion' / 'religious tradition', its various 'groups', and the 'individuals' who are more or less connected to a group or a tradition. There is a dynamic interaction between the three levels of a tradition and between different groups and traditions. The concepts of interpretation and reflexivity (p. 25) should both be understood as a reaction against the idea that the researcher will be able to leave his or her prejudices behind while engaging in uncovering the 'essential' features of a studied phenomenon. Instead Jackson discusses critical ways of moving between one's own experiences and concepts and the phenomena and concepts encountered through 'the other'. The concept of edification (p. 25f) refers to learning outcomes resulting from dialogical encounters with RE subject matter. The basic theoretical concepts of the interpretive approach have been applied and discussed both by members of the RE communities of practice at WRERU and UiS and by other researchers.[26] In this article (see below) the intersection between the interpretive approach and RE action research is of particular interest.

RE approaches or models may be distinguished according to where they are placed on a continuum between an emphasis on subject contents and an emphasis on pupils' existential questions as being basic to the subject (e.g. Jackson 2004). O'Grady seems a little closer to the pupils' personal development pole, perhaps influenced by Skeie (1998) who underlines questions of identity and the individual pupil's 'potential' for religiosity and world view reflexivity. There is no conflict between O'Grady and Jackson regarding the contribution which the interpretive approach may make to subject contents centred as well as pupil centred RE. However, towards the end of the book Jackson states that "logical primacy has to be given to the former [i.e. the 'learning about' factor in contrast to the 'student development' factor], since we are dealing specifically with religious education" (Ipgrave, Jackson 2009, p. 166). O'Grady seems more occupied with the role of RE in the young pupils' journey whilst finding their own voice. Thus he underlines the concept of edification.

---

[26] See e.g. Iversen 2013 in a book dedicated to Robert Jackson.

The 'interpretive and culturally aware approach to RE' – at UiS

In an early text from the ROM project, Johannessen and Husebø (2010, p. 34) state that the project's main aim "was to try out an interpretive and culturally aware approach to RE when encountering religious and cultural diversity in Norwegian teacher education and schooling" (my translation). The use of the adjectives 'interpretive' and 'culturally aware' signals a combination of the interpretive approach and Geir Skeie's (1998) theoretical contribution, distinguishing between 'traditional' and 'modern plurality'.[27] A common basic interest between Jackson and Skeie is the recognition of religious and cultural diversity and that the modern educational institutions will acknowledge and respond to this. In the book from the first ROM community of practice (including experienced RE teachers), Skeie uses a 'muted' phrase with regard to the interpretive approach: "We have also let ourselves be inspired by the research of Robert Jackson at the University of Warwick […]" (Skeie 2010b, p. 15, my translation). He then follows up with a simplified presentation of the main theoretical concepts and viewpoints from the interpretive approach to RE, linking them to the concepts of place and space ('*rom*' in Norwegian) in the UiS based project. From his summary of the first ROM project (Skeie 2010c, p. 141), it appears that the RE teachers have been introduced to the ideas of the interpretive approach twice, first by the Norwegian researchers in the community of practice, then by Jackson – the successful originator – during the study visit to England.

Regarding the second ROM community of practice, Dag Husebø (2013a, pp. 56-60) makes it clear that his PhD thesis – in subject didactics – represents a 'trying out' of RE theory, i.e. a culturally aware approach combined with an interpretive approach to RE. He states that the concepts of representation, interpretation, reflexivity and edification were central to several of the participants in the ROM project, also that the culturally aware approach to a lesser degree had developed a set of didactic concepts and particular methods for RE as a school subject. However, a dynamic understanding (through constructions and deconstructions) of the concept of culture is underlined as well as a constant interplay between the life world of the pupils and their local cultural contexts (pp. 59f).

Comparison of aims, contents and approaches

Although there is a close affinity between the aims, contents and approaches in the action research projects at UW and UiS, a small distinction between them has appeared. The creators of WRERU's interpretive approach had applied ethnographical methods whilst developing RE text books[28] for schools. This was initially not the case

---

[27] 'Traditional plurality' refers to the proximity of diverse religious and world view traditions within a certain geographical region, whilst 'modern plurality' implies that reflexive changes of faith and world view issues and positions take place within individuals. Cf. Jackson 2009, p. 25, note 6.

[28] See Jackson 2009, pp. 26f, cf. The Warwick RE project (1994-96?), with the *Bridges to religions* series, and the *Interpreting religions* series, both series published by Heinemann, Oxford.

in the 'cultural awareness' approach based on Skeie's PhD thesis. Compared with the 'original'[29] interpretive approach Skeie's basic understanding of and values for RE seem to be a little more individual or actor / agent oriented and a little less group or tradition oriented, a feature which may be more related to value preferences than to epistemology (cf. Jackson's statement of 'logical primacy' for subject content). Thus, there may have been a larger space for pedagogical creativity in the ROM project, perhaps particularly in the first community of practice, including the experienced RE teachers. However, the different members of the two communities of practice were at certain points in the progress introduced to the basic concepts of representation, interpretation, reflexivity and edification. Both RE approaches may be called contextual and diversity-oriented.

Design and methods in the RE action research at UW and UiS

I will now turn to the question of action research designs and methods involved in the two projects. The paragraphs above have indicated that although there was a close affinity between the UW and the UiS communities of practice, there were also some varieties connected with the degree of individual space for didactic creativity.

A comparison of the use and understanding of the concept of community of practice is central in the articles' third question. It will involve an exploration of the degree of coequality and mutuality between 'researchers' and 'participants' (Svensson and Nielsen 2006, p. 14) – and, with terms used by Dag Husebø, between 'university based teacher educators' and 'school based teacher educators'.[30]

'Community of practice' as applied in the REDCo and the ROM projects

The idea of a community of practice was basic both to the British REDCo project and to the ROM project. Kevin O'Grady appears as the WRERU group's action research expert (O'Grady 2009). He particularly emphasizes the cyclic, iterative processes of the relationship between members of a long term learning community, exemplified by his relation to his comprehensive school pupils in RE. He combines the main conceptual ideas from the interpretive approach with action theory concepts, e.g. motivation, dialogue (with difference), existential interest, personal significance, and ethical interest. Compared with Jackson's introduction to the interpretive approach, O'Grady seems more occupied with the voice of the individual pupil. He refers to Skeie as one among several educationalists "who pursue the theme of the re-description of the self" (p. 33). Each member of UW's REDCo community and the two ROM communities of practice had to contribute regularly by sharing experiences

---

[29] Jackson's former PhD students (e.g. O'Grady 2009 and Iversen 2013, previously Eriksen) have developed the interpretive approach further, with small variations regarding basic epistemological hermeneutical issues.
[30] Husebø (2013b, p. 39, note 2) states that he has borrowed the two terms from professor Kari Smith at the University of Bergen. Like Ipgrave's concept of 'practitioner-researchers' the two terms signify a 'democratic turn' to a closer proximity of practices.

and thoughts orally and in writing about their own individual action research project. The sub-projects would include e.g. secondary school students, primary or secondary school (RE) teachers, and various categories of RE student teachers. This premise of carrying through an individual project was the 'entrance ticket' to the communities of practice, so to speak, including the agreement to write about the project process and in some way publish the results (Ipgrave 2009, Skeie 2010a, Husebø 2013a).

In their joint text about the ROM project, Johannessen and Husebø (2010) underline a principle of equality between researchers and practitioners (or participants): "While establishing the project we were emphasizing the creation of coequality and mutually committed cooperation between the school teachers and students and the researchers from the university" (p. 35, my translation). It seems, however, that the two ROM communities report in slightly different ways with regard to the cooperation between the groups of participants. In the first community, Skeie and Johannessen were the researchers. The latter writes: "My role has previously been that of 'normative process researcher' [cf. Johannessen 2008, my comment] and later action researcher in an action learning project, and my informants and cooperative partners have been primary and lower secondary school teachers" (Johannessen 2010, p. 107, my translation). One may ask if Johannessen here reserves the concepts of 'action researcher' and 'my informants' for his role as observing ethnographer, while using 'action learning' and 'cooperative partners' about the role of the RE teachers.

In the second ROM community, however, Husebø emphasizes that all the nine members have participated in various aspects of the action researcher's role, i.e. all have been first-, second- and third-person action researchers but to different degrees.[31] While Skeie (2010b, 2010c) seems to be reluctant to state the aim of the first community as that of 'trying out' the interpretive approach (this approach has been but one source of inspiration), Husebø does not hesitate to include the concept of 'trying out' in the main research question and title of his PhD thesis (e.g. Husebø 2013a, pp. 8, 15). Obviously, the idea of 'trying out' the particular approach has come from the university based educators – even if Skeie shows reservations towards 'implementation research' (Skeie 2009, p. 230). Below, however, we will see that the relationship between the university lecturers and the internship supervisors (the school based educators) were changing, as a result of negotiations within the community.

Compared with the ROM projects, the UW's REDCo community of practice on the one hand was more heterogeneous, including a higher degree of educational and pedagogical expertise, and on the other hand, regarding the 'trying out' of the interpretive approach, it was more similar to the second than to the first ROM community. Judith Everington, Kevin O'Grady and Nigel Fancourt have all described and reflected on specific cyclic processes between themselves as educational and pedagogical leaders and their respective students (secondary school or PGCE

---

[31] All have reflexively monitored their own practice, worked dialogically with colleagues, and documented their development of strategies to others (Reason and Bradbury 2008, p. 6 in Husebø 2013a, pp. 13f).

students) as well as contributed to reflexive texts in the book (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady 2009). In her role as the 'storyteller' of the WRERU community of practice, Everington has mainly written a text of harmonious development and 'happy ending'. In the final chapter of the book, Skeie (2009), from a REDCo perspective, comments on the totality of contributions, drawing 'conflict' as well as 'dialogue' into his discussions.

Because of the article's third question, I will here only mention some of Skeie's critical points in the REDCo book's final chapter. He indicates that compared with other REDCo action research projects (including both descriptive and prescriptive aspects) the UW based project sometimes shows a lack of (self-) criticism. He emphasizes this in order to point to two types of arguments directed against action research. On the one hand action researchers are accused of too easily conforming to the instrumental agendas of modern state policy. On the other hand the action researcher seems to be in a dilemma when aiming at practitioners' empowerment and at the same time having a critical eye towards the practitioner's practice whilst collaborating with her (Skeie 2009, p. 229).[32] Comparing the ROM community with UW's REDCo community, Skeie deals with the former critical argument. He admits that the ROM project has elements of implementation research. However, the theoretical part of the RE model was played down initially, he claims, and only drawn into dialogues about practical experiences later when opportunities arose.[33]

With regard to their understanding of communities of practice and situated learning, Johannessen and Husebø distinguish between four levels of systematic knowledge development (i.e. factual knowledge and face to face communication; situated knowledge based on meta learning and including linguistic abstraction; systematic knowledge; and finally a fourth level identified by concepts like meaning horizon and overlapping life worlds).[34] Basic ideas involved in advanced relational knowledge attainment are the development of trust and solidarity, the sharing of both successful initiatives and experiences of failure, which in turn may feed new enthusiasm, increased energy and new courage and self-esteem. Some of the participants in both the ROM communities reported about such experiences, e.g. of mutual trust and raised self-esteem (Johannessen and Husebø 2010, pp. 39-46). Skeie (2009, p. 231) finds such results innovative and valuable.

In the second ROM community, Husebø (2013b) has thematized the participatory trajectories of the community members, particularly the two school based teacher

---

[32] This dilemma is particularly evident when the leaders of a community of practice will also mark the student members' / co-researchers' examination papers (Lied 2012, p. 183ff). Husebø (2013a) does not reflect on this.

[33] Skeie 2009, p. 230. I expect Skeie here means the project of the first ROM community of practice, i.e. the experienced RE teachers' implementation of the school reform of 2006, called 'Kunnskapsløftet'. On the other hand, Skeie's comment may also refer to the students' different trajectories in the second ROM community.

[34] The theoretical sources they refer to (in addition to Wenger) with regard to these levels of knowledge are particularly G. Bateson, L. Qvortrup and J. Habermas (Johannessen and Husebø 2010, pp. 39ff).

educators and the five RE student teachers. He discusses the student teachers'
trajectories partly as 'stable inbound' and partly as 'negotiations for outbound'
trajectories. This means that three of the students completed the final cycle of text
production in their individual development projects including the premise of trying out
the interpretive approach in their bachelor theses (pp. 49), while two of the students
(p. 50) were allowed to write their theses without applying the interpretive approach.
One of the two school based teacher educators submitted a successful bachelor thesis
to the UiS and later got a version of it published. Husebø characterizes their 'journey'
as a 'negotiated change towards an inbound trajectory' (p. 45).

Comparison of design and understanding of 'community of practice'

It seems to me that there is a small difference between the general understanding of
community of practice in UW's REDCo project and in the two ROM projects. All the
members of the REDCo project knew the 'interpretive approach' to RE prior to the
action research project while this was not the case in the ROM project. Most of the
participants of the REDCo project seem to be closer to an understanding of action
research as implementation of a pedagogical model than to an understanding of action
research as learning about subject matter and social communication through
negotiations and democratic dialogue. In both ROM projects there probably has been
more space (compared with the REDCo project) for individual decisions and a
plurality of views and practices. What project design and methods mean with regard to
a (lasting) proximity of different RE field practices cannot be answered empirically
but will be commented on below.

'Community of practice' and 'cooperative network'

The processes behind Husebø's categorizations of the participatory trajectories in
the second ROM community are of particular interest to my forth question which
involves a tentative comparison between the REDCo and ROM projects on the one
hand and the RE pilot on the other. What differences and similarities between the
application of 'community of practice' and of 'cooperative network' should be
emphasized in order to reflect on further progress within practice oriented RE and RE
teacher research? Before I enter into a more normative discussion I need to describe
the RE pilot a little more.

The achievements of the RE pilot at UiA

Inger Margrethe Tallaksen and I worked together on the RE pilot project for two
years. As a participant in the larger 'oral literacy' RE project I strategically drew on
Tallaksen's solid connections with UiA's Teacher Education Department and its list of
internship RE supervisors. The main aim of the RE pilot was to develop further and
fortify particular cooperation initiatives between UiA lecturers and lower secondary
RE teachers, initiatives including good interaction between a variety of RE practices

and theoretical approaches, and where RE student teachers were actively involved. This project never developed or chose to apply one particular theoretical model.

The two lower secondary teachers in the RE pilot's cooperative network generously let Tallaksen and I observe their RE lessons and read their criteria for assessing the young students' oral project performances. Because of our focus on oral literacy, we mainly chose to observe the students' oral presentations of the projects including the assessment. The four of us had discussed and planned the second year of the RE pilot together but during the first year we hardly discussed the term 'research and development work', let alone distinguished 'research' from 'learning'.

During the first half year of the project, it became clear that the two RE teachers did not have the time (and perhaps did not see the need, cf. Husebø 2013a, p. 90, see also Afdal 2010) to explore particular issues and to contribute anything in writing. The two of them were successful teachers, and they provided us two university based teacher educators with experiences we had asked for.[35] Early intentions of understanding the group as a community of practice (also including a theoretical approach to action research) were played down in the process. Because Tallaksen was more involved in UiA's teacher education programs than I, her field of practice was closer to the lower secondary field and she was better positioned to achieve results linking theory and practice in the program of teacher education.[36]

During the cooperative process, the project came to include two distinctive parts. One, for which Tallaksen was in charge, involved her group of student teachers in the first year of a four year program of general teacher education. In this sub-project, which had two cycles of realization, particularly chosen groups of lower secondary students, chosen by the two teachers in the cooperative network, performed the oral presentations of their project work again (some time after having done this at school) at UiA in a session of RE didactics / pedagogy for first year student teachers. Thus Tallaksen and her group of students met the 'real' world of the 13-15 year old

---

[35] Early in the first term of the RE pilot Tallaksen and I invited nine lower secondary RE teachers (i.e. internship supervisors) to an introductory research and development meeting at UiA. The invitation letter had indicated that the project was to be based on the idea of a community of practice, including the idea of coequality and mutually committed cooperation between the RE teachers and the teacher educators / researchers. A precise definition of the concept of community of practice had not been given and the teachers' influence on contents, methods and forms of results was quite open. At the meeting, this was a major point of criticism from the most outspoken teachers. To cut a longer story short: There was a dialogue revealing (particularly through the voice of one male teacher) the so called 'gap' between (theoretical) teacher educators / educational researchers and (practical) school teachers / internship supervisors. After a short deadline, we ended up with two participating teachers (who had not said much during the meeting). With these two teachers there was a 'flying start' since one of them was an earlier student of mine, and the other had previously cooperated with Tallaksen.

[36] Tallaksen and I have different but overlapping competences and work experiences, she has more experience as an RE teacher in upper secondary school while I have more RE research experience. For some years, I have been but little involved in RE teacher education and mainly lectured and supervised students in UiA's bachelor program of Religion, ethics and culture, and in the master program of Religion, ethics and society.

youngsters. The student teachers did an exercise of assessment, knowing the criteria, after having observed the lower secondary students' performances, and were then acquainted with the marks given by the teachers (Tallaksen 2013).

The other part of the RE pilot project mainly consisted of a joint guest lecture by the two lower secondary teachers (about their work as RE teachers and the encounter with their young students) for a group of first year bachelor students in a course called *Religious and moral studies from a social scientific perspective*.[37] This is a course I have coordinated for some years. These students had themselves carried through written and oral projects as part of the formal course examinations. Comparing the bachelor students' project work with the work done by the lower secondary students provided me with an opportunity to work abductively on processes of guiding students whose written or oral work, for example, revealed aspects of prejudgements (Haakedal 2014 work in progress).

In the RE pilot in general, and in the two sub-projects in particular, neither of the two lower secondary teachers chose a sub-project of their own to carry through by way of action research cycles. The implicit idea (within subject didactics) in both sub-projects seems to have been that student teachers (and bachelor students) in their university education learn more by observing 'real' lower secondary students' performances and /or by listening directly to 'practitioners' (teachers with first-hand experience with youngsters at school) than when the university lecturers, who are responsible for the curricular themes of the relevant courses, do not include such 'first-hand' learning experiences. On the other hand, both Tallaksen and I acknowledge occasional comments by our lower secondary school colleagues: Being observed by external cooperative partners and having the opportunity to talk about the observed practice meant that they sometimes were able to view their teaching and their relationship with the teenagers from a different perspective, thus becoming more aware of 'matters taken for granted' and increasing their professional reflections.

Comparing 'community of practice' and 'cooperative network'

In this paragraph I will suggest some main differences and similarities between the RE pilot at UiA and the ROM project at UiS.[38] I will also indicate a few reasons for some of the differences and I reflect normatively on the comparison. When first launching the UiA based RE pilot, I had the intention of doing action research including working in a community of practice. Tallaksen (2013) writes about 'a cooperative project'.

Included in the concept of community of practice are ideas of situated learning and a trajectory from a legitimate peripheral position to a more central position. The premise for a learning trajectory seems to be the formulation of an individual sub-question related to the common theme / subject matter of the community. Such a

---

[37] The course mainly covers religious and life view / world view socialization and learning by using sociological, psychological and educational approaches.
[38] For space reasons the WRERU project is here left out.

trajectory is also basic to the tradition of 'master apprentice learning', underlining practical imitation and instruction / guidance from a master. The design and methods which came to be used in the RE pilot had strong similarities to 'master apprentice learning' with the lower secondary teachers as masters.

In his PhD thesis, Husebø (2013a, p. 61) claims that there is a distinction between working with the concept of community of practice and the so called 'master apprentice learning'. According to Husebø, in the course of the practical relational processes, the two leaders of the second ROM community, he and Skeie, underwent a learning trajectory from having taken for granted a 'traditional' practical supervising position for the two school based teacher educators – to viewing them as members (in a mutually committed cooperation) with a theoretical-practical trajectory of their own. Skeie and Husebø, being experts of the interpretive and culturally aware approach to be 'tried out', had not anticipated that the school based educators would insist on achieving more theoretical knowledge in order to accomplish their job within the community and 'claim' their position (Husebø 2013b, pp. 45-48).

The degree of eagerness for more theoretical learning is not similarly apparent among the RE teachers in the first ROM community. In their publication, edited by Skeie (2010a), they primarily describe their research themes and questions, their individual practice, including reflections of relationships, processes and trajectories. Each chapter from an RE teacher has a short added passage by Skeie where he builds a bridge between the teacher's text and relevant concepts from the field of RE subject didactics, not least the theoretical concepts from the interpretive approach. By the end of the project, the book thus testifies to a continued diversity of positions within the community of practice. However, some real achievements have been obtained: Increased mutual trust and the published book exist as a lasting result. According to Skeie[39] there are strong chances of further co-operative research and development work between the researchers and the RE teachers of the (first) ROM community.

Unlike the first ROM community, we leaders of the RE pilot had no large group of RE teachers to engage readily because they already knew each other having worked with the same researchers previously in a project involving curriculum implementation (Johannessen 2008). The two RE teachers who became our partners in the cooperative network appreciated the teamwork and the opportunity it gave them to address (teacher) students on the basis of work experience and professional expertise. Tallaksen's sub-project strengthened her experience based approach to RE teacher education.[40] So far my learning trajectory, related to the RE pilot network, has

[39] A conversation I had with him in July 2014.
[40] Repstad and Tallaksen (2014, p. 277) refer to a named teacher when presenting a list of assessment criteria for an oral task in RE given to 15 year old students during their final year at the lower secondary school. There is no reference to the RE pilot project as such. Balancing between crediting authors of texts in the field of (school) practice and using anonymizing techniques is sometimes a dilemma in action research (Husebø 2013a, pp. 87ff).

included a deeper understanding of teacher education as a field of didactics in need of continuous contact with the field of primary and secondary education.[41]

Comparing the designs and methods used in the UW and UiS projects and the RE pilot at UiA, there is a major difference between the two first and the third regarding operative connections to research networks. Jackson and Skeie had both earned their leading positions by launching a pedagogical (interpretive) approach / a subject didactic (culturally aware) model for RE, by having an appropriate academic institutional basis[42] and the ability to gather colleagues (being enlisted in PhD programs) and members from other field practices (local education authority leaders and RE school teachers) in jointly supporting action research projects and sub-projects. My interpretation, after a closer reading of the main action research publications from the REDCo and ROM projects, is that most members of the three communities of practice were not fully acquainted with theoretical aspects of action research from the beginning. However, the leaders were able to insist on 'entrance tickets' (each member's individual sub-project) and to lead dialogues during agreed regular community meetings. The initiative in these projects was taken by university based researchers who were able to gain the support within their communities for a common idea of RE. However, in his abductive data production, Husebø (2013a, p. 79) developed the empirical category of 'resistance'. One difference between the second ROM project and the RE pilot is that in the ROM project there were (3rd and 4th year) student teachers who were in a position to resist through negotiation, whilst in Tallaksen and the lower secondary RE teachers' sub-project, the (1st year) teacher students were given a task of 'learning-by-doing'.

Like in the ROM project, the initiative to the RE pilot came from the university based teacher educators, but the two fields of practice (Tallaksen's and mine, i.e. the program of teacher education and the bachelor program) proved difficult to integrate.[43] In our small network, we did not manage to launch common ideas (related to particular concepts of any distinctive RE approach or model) for individual cyclic 'actions'. However, Tallaksen – in cooperation with the two lower secondary teachers – carried through two cycles of what may be characterized as actions of 'master apprentice learning' combined with a task of 'learning-by-doing'. Thus, the RE-pilot, like the ROM-project, may be said to have used both descriptive and normative methods belonging to the broad methodology of action research. In Repstad and

---

[41] I have also gained a deeper understanding of structurally impeding links between my position at UiA and my access to (sub-) fields relevant to teacher education.
[42] The WRERU context was perhaps more suitable to action research than Skeie's UiS context.
[43] It may be easier, though, in UiA's new (autumn term 2014) integration of two programs, i.e. the bachelor and master programs in religion, ethics and culture / society (where the students are called 'subject students', in Norw.: '*disiplinstudenter*') and a (master) program of RE teacher education (where a didactical course – including internship periods – is integrated and where the students are called 'master students', in Norw.: '*lektorstudenter*').

Tallaksen's (2014) recent book on RE didactics[44], there are many quotes by unnamed secondary school students and student teachers as well as fictive examples of teachers' reflections. There are also many references to empirical RE research (e.g. Hodne and Tallaksen 2014) and to other relevant research and development sources. Repstad and Tallaksen to a large extent use a language of practical normative advice. The normativity of the action research design used by the UiS communities seems more negotiable than the normativity of the 'master apprentice learning' design implicit in the UiA based project.

I will also point to some structural differences which have probably affected the RE pilot's achievements: The teacher education at UiA is organised through a so called 'matrix model' which means that the employees involved in teacher education are spread across five faculties.[45] This seems to be a distinctive difference between RE teacher education at UiA and similar education at UiS and UW. At UiA's Institute of religion, philosophy and history, supervision of PhD candidates has so far (per 2014) been conducted by sociologists of religion (who are little involved in the Institute's programs of teacher education) and ethicists through the PhD program of Religion, ethics and society.[46]

Concluding comparisons and reflections

In my summary of the comparison of research frames I have underlined the importance of a solid research reputation and skills connected with the building of long lasting research relationships. A common feature regarding future research resources connected with both the UiS and the UiA projects is the trust developed between particular RE school teachers / school based educators and university based teacher educators. Such personal relationships seem vital to the realization of new research and development projects.[47] However, economic resources also matter.

Regarding the second research question, I find that UW's REDCo project and ROM have a clearer value profile (e.g. emphasis on diversity) than the very open, and implicitly harmonizing, RE pilot project. On the other hand, the RE pilot did not prioritize reflecting self-critically on (multi)cultural values and on existing practices.

The third research question (of designs and methods) is most relevant to an ideal of proximity of practices, although the two first themes cannot be ignored. The concept of knowledge is basic to Skeie in his advice for the establishment of communities of

---

[44] The book is a stark contrast to Andreassen's (2012) book on RE didactics, both with regard to handling 'competing' positions in the field of RE didactics and when it comes to the space used for discussing basic theoretical concepts in the field.

[45] Cooperation between e.g. colleagues involved in the academic field of education and the fields of religion, philosophy and history have not been particularly encouraged nor practiced.

[46] An example of research from these two academic fields, see Repstad and Henriksen 2005.

[47] Tallaksen has secured internal UiA funding for a small project called *Læreres, studenters og elevers bruk av læreplan og lærebok i RLE-faget på ungdomstrinnet* (my translation: *Teachers', students' and pupils' use of curriculum and textbook in the subject of RLE at the lower secondary school*) where at least one of the earlier mentioned lower secondary RE teachers will take part during the academic year of 2014-15.

practice where each member / teacher has a sub-project. He also pays close attention to the interest of the pupils and their expected participation, as well as the community members' interests and motivation regarding their sub-projects (Skeie 2010c, p. 147). Skeie has less to say about the function of being a leading provider of basic theoretical ideas (to be 'tried out') and about cooperation between researchers and educational developers in a community of practice. Johannessen's role in the first ROM project is not quite clear but seems to have been closer to that of an ethnographic researcher than that of an action researcher. Husebø harmonizes a little too much the different roles and positions within a community of practice. However, I acknowledge his category of 'resistance' which is absent in UW's REDCo project. In the RE pilot, I think that the concept of knowledge was not taken enough into consideration, partly because of initial strong 'resistance' to 'trying out' theory based themes and issues. Instead, an implicit design of 'master apprentice learning' was practiced.

By comparing the use and understanding of concepts like community of practice and cooperative network, I find that regarding methods the former implies certain theory related principles, values and ideas, e.g. of regular meetings for mutual commenting on individual written work, while the latter allows for a fuzzier design with less regular network contacts. I believe that the different terminology is also related to the organisation of (RE) teacher education, which is different at the three relevant academic institutions. Through comparing ROM and the RE pilot, I find some interrelated differences and similarities regarding the relationship between the initiators of the research projects (the university based successful applicants for funding and their colleagues and PhD students) and the complementing, 'sought-after', 'other' participants of both communities of practice and networks. The differences relate to the degree of the leaders' ownership of basic theoretical ideas / subject didactic models to be 'tried out'. The similarities relate to the phenomenon of 'resistance' which appears directly and indirectly in all the relevant projects. It seems a matter of choice / theoretical preferences whether a researcher will emphasize harmonizing or diverging team processes when writing up research results.

Having emphasized the institutional basis in addition to the concepts of community of practice and cooperative network, my final remarks concern the relationship between the former (the organisation of the academic institution) and the latter two. Although I find elements like common academic ownership of basic aims and (educational) ideas of great importance for successful project work within a community or a network, I also want to underline the relevance of other elements, e.g. social skills, character and the sharing of oral space. These elements are linked to basic values, both implicit (e.g. 'heritage' values which are taken for granted) and explicit values, such as philosophical and/or ideological values which are reflexively integrated in one's mind and (body) language. Here I find the concept of field competition (cf. Bourdieu) very relevant. I experience that the will to compete and be recognized is strong in almost every human being. Thus I can understand why some participants in the broad field of RE research and development and RE teacher education seem to maintain a distinction between the practice of school teachers as the

mastering of pedagogical methods on the one hand, and the practice of researchers of 'basic disciplines' and/or educational science on the other hand.

After participating in the RE pilot and writing comparatively, I am – methodologically and with regard to a philosophy of basic trust (cf. Haakedal 2007) – convinced that the sub-field of (RE) teacher education is best served by interactive research and development work promoting proximity between school practice and research practice. Teacher education will profit from a bridging and complementing mutuality between school based and university based teacher educators. However, it seems to me that the efforts to establish and/or maintain a durable RE research and development team at a university (college) which includes teacher education programs are closely linked to (a possible lack of) strategies for challenging and/or maintaining what is held as an appropriate balance between critical research and system supporting implementation studies.

References

Afdal, G. (2010). *Researching religious education as social practice.* Münster: Waxmann Verlag.

Alvesson, M. and Sköldberg, K. 2009. *Reflexive methodology. New vistas for qualitative research*. 2nd edition. London: Sage.

Andreassen, B.-O. (2012). *Religionsdidaktikk. En innføring*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bråten, O. M. H. (2013). *Towards a methodology of comparative studies in religious education. A study of England and Norway*. Münster: Waxmann. (This PhD thesis was submitted at the University of Warwick, http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/3122/, in 2009 with the title *A comparative study of religious education in state schools in England and Norway*.)

Everington, J. (2009). The Warwick community of practice. A journey. In *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach*, Eds. Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 182-197. Münster: Waxmann.

Haakedal, E. (2004). *'Det er jo vanlig praksis hos de fleste her ...' Religionslærerrolle, livstolkning og skolekulturell ritualisering – en religionspedagogisk studie av grunnskolelæreres handlingsrom på 1990-tallet*. PhD thesis. Oslo: Unipub, Universitetet i Oslo.

Haakedal, E. (2005). Å være religionslærerutdanner. Noen refleksjoner over konkurranse om fagprinsipper. In *Artikler om høgskolepedagogikk*, Ed. Lager, 7-15. Skriftserien nr. 118. Kristiansand: Høgskolen i Agder.

Haakedal, E. (2007). Does public religious education imply 'symbolic violence'? In search of a political theory of religious education. In *Peace or Violence. The Ends of Religion and Education?* Eds. Astley, Robbins and Francis, 131-150. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Haakedal, E. (2014 work in progress). Projects in religion and world view courses: A comparative pedagogical study of project work on (members of) local faith and world view communities by lower secondary pupils and first year university students. Collegial paper presented at the 19th *International Seminar on Religious Education and Values*, 27 July – 1 August, at York, UK.

Hiim, H. (2010). *Pedagogisk aksjonsforskning. Tilnærminger, eksempler og kunnskapsfilosofisk grunnlag*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Hodne, H. and Tallaksen, I. M. (2014). Hvilken betydning har læremidler i RLE-faget? *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift*, Vol 98, no 5, 352-363.

Husebø, D. (2012). Bridging theory and practice in Norwegian teacher education through action research. *Educational Action Research*, vol. 20, pp. 455-471. (Included in Husebø's PhD thesis.)

Husebø, D. (2013a). *Fagdidaktisk utprøving av en fortolkende kulturbevisst tilnærming til Religion, livssyn og etikk-undervisning.* PhD thesis. Stavanger: Universitetet i Stavanger.

Husebø, D. (2013b). Participative Trajectories. Contextualisation and instigated negotiations in an action research project applied in Norwegian RE teacher education. In *Exploring context in religious education research. Empirical, methodological and theoretical perspectives*, Eds. Skeie et al., 39-55. Münster: Waxmann. (Included in Husebø's PhD thesis.)

Ipgrave, J. 2009. Introduction. In *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach*, Eds. Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 14-18. Münster: Waxmann.

Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R. 2009. Reflecting on the interpretive approach. In *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach*, Eds. Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 151-168. Münster: Waxmann.

Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R. and O'Grady, K. (Eds.) (2009). *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach.* Münster: Waxmann.

Iversen, L. L. (2013). 'Can you be a Muslim and not believe in God?' How fluid or solid are religions? Introducing viscosity to the interpretive approach. In *Religion in education. Innovation in international research*, Eds. Miller, O'Grady and McKenna, 167-181. New York, London: Routledge.

Jackson, R. (1997). *Religious education. An interpretive approach*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Jackson, R. (2004). *Rethinking religious education and plurality. Issues in diversity and pedagogy*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Jackson, R. (2009). The interpretive approach to religious education and the development of a community of practice. In *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach*, Eds. Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 21-31. Münster: Waxmann.

Jackson, R., Miedema, S., Weisse, W. and Willaime, J.-P. (Eds.) (2007). *Religion and education in Europe. Developments, contexts and debates*. Münster: Waxmann.

Johannessen, Ø. L. (2008). *Plan- og praksisutvikling i KRL-faget. Rapport fra et samarbeidsprosjekt mellom Universitetet i Stavanger og kommuner i Nord-Rogaland*. Stavanger: Misjonshøyskolens forlag.

Johannessen, Ø. L. (2010). Mellom barken og veden. Om lærerrollen i religionsfaget i spenningen mellom samfunnskrav og elevens interesse. In *Religionsundervisning og mangfold. Rom for læring i religion, livssyn og etikk*, Ed. Skeie, 105-123. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Johannessen, Ø. L. and Husebø, D. (2010). Kunnskapsformer og kunnskapsutvikling i praksisfellesskap. In *Forskeren i møte med praksis. Refleksivitet, etikk og kunnskapsutvikling*, Eds. Lund, Postholm and Skeie, 33-48. Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forlag. (Included in Husebø's PhD thesis.)

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lied, S. (2012). *Studenter i forskning – ett svar på utfordringer fra det flerkulturelle og livstolkningsplurale klasserommet*. Vallset: Oplandske Bokforfag.

Nicolaisen, T. (2007). Pluralitet, planer og praksis – mangfold i klasserommet når KRL står på timeplanen. Perspektiver på aksjonsforskning og livssynspluralitet i en grunnskole i Oslo. *Prismet*, vol. 58, pp. 3-16.

O'Grady, K. (2009). Action research and religious education. In *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach*, Eds. Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 32-41. Münster: Waxmann.

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2008). Introduction. In *The Sage Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice*, 2nd edition, Eds. Reason and Bradbury, 1-10. London: Sage.

Repstad, K. and Tallaksen, I. M. (2014). *Praktisk fagdidaktikk for religionsfagene*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

Repstad, P. and Henriksen, J.-O. (Eds.) (2005). *Mykere kristendom? Sørlandsreligion i endring*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Skeie, G. (1998). *En kulturbevisst religionspedagogikk*. PhD thesis. Trondheim: NTNU Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet.

Skeie, G. (2004). An overview of religious education research in Norway. In *Towards a European perspective on religious education*, Eds. Larsson and Gustavsson, 317-331. Skelefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag.

Skeie, G. (2009). A community of dialogue and conflict? Discussion of community of practice findings in a wider European context. In *Religious education research through a community of practice. Action research and the interpretive approach*, Eds. Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 216-234. Münster: Waxmann.

Skeie, G. (Ed.) (2010a). *Religionsundervisning og mangfold. Rom for læring i religion, livssyn og etikk*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Skeie, G. (2010b). Forord. [and] Rom for læring i religion, livssyn og etikk. In *Religionsundervisning og mangfold. Rom for læring i religion, livssyn og etikk*, Ed. Skeie, 9-10 and 10-20. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Skeie, G. (2010c). Erfaringsbasert forsknings- og utviklingsarbeid. In *Religionsundervisning og mangfold. Rom for læring i religion, livssyn og etikk*, Ed. Skeie, 124-152. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Steen-Olsen, T. and Eikseth, A. G. (2009). Aksjonsforskning og aksjonslæring. Læringssamspill i et læringsfellesskap. In *Å utvikle en lærende skole. Aksjonsforskning og aksjonslæring i praksis*, Eds. Steen-Olsen and Postholm, 17-35. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget.

Svensson, L. and Nielsen, K. Aa. (2006). A framework for the book. In *Action research and interactive research. Beyond practice and theory*, Eds. Nilesen and Svensson, 13-44. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing.

Tallaksen, I. M. (2013). Lærerstudenter lærer av elever. Et samarbeidsprosjekt om vurdering av muntlige ferdigheter. *Bedre Skole*, No 3, 66-69.

Tiller, T. (1999). *Aksjonslæring. Forskende partnerskap i skolen.* Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget.