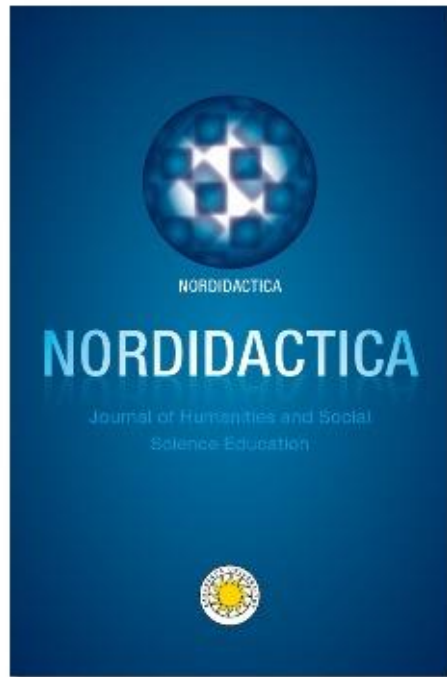


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Religious Education, Identity and Nation Building – the Case of Greenland

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Abstract: The article examines the interplay between Religious Education, Identity and Nation-Building in Greenland. Through analysis of different levels of curriculum it is demonstrated that just as Christian Religion was an important part of the early Nation-Building process in Greenland in the 18th century, Inuit Religion is used as an important part of the Nation-Building process today as Greenland moves towards greater independence.

KEYWORDS: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, CURRICULUM STUDIES, GREENLAND, NATIONAL IMAGINARIES, IDENTITY, CHRISTIANITY, INUIT RELIGION

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Introduction

Religious Education in Greenland has in various ways and to varying degrees been discussed since the 1700s and touches in many respects the core of Greenlandic identity and nation formation. Like in many other places changes in religious education in Greenland reflect other historical processes that are not in themselves necessarily educational nor religious in origin. What happens in Religious Education may often be seen as a sign of other deeper currents in society. The aim of this article is to explore such relationships in Greenland by looking at Religious Education in Greenlandic schools as it is expressed in the official curriculum. The main argument in this article is that Religious Education is part of the Greenlandic Nation Building in the current process toward greater independence, just as Religious Education always has been part of the nation building process in Greenland. Methodological I draw on two ideas in Oddrun Bråten's work on comparative studies in religious education (Bråten 2013), the first being different levels of curriculum, the second being concepts of civil enculturation, civil culture and national imaginaries. The material used are legislative and academic texts, other official documents and empirical data from a small qualitative study among school administrators, teachers and students.

Methodology: analysing different levels of curriculum

In capturing and analyzing the curriculum of religious education in Greenland, I have found it useful to look at the different levels of curriculum found in Oddrun Bråten's methodology on comparative studies in religious education (Bråten 2013). Referring to Goodlad she differentiates between four levels of curriculum: the societal level, the institutional level, the instructional level and the experiential level. The societal level is the level which is most remote from the receivers, i.e. the students in Greenlandic schools. This level includes the socio-political processes involved in determining what subjects and topics should be studied in schools, and what materials should be used. Actors on this level are politicians, special interest groups, different kinds of administrators and professional specialist, and the general public. In Greenland, the societal level is the political, public as well as professional debates about the curricula/syllabuses for citizenship education in schools. The institutional level is the curriculum derived from the societal level but specified by the state or province and modified by the school board. The institutional level in Greenland is the law, the national curriculum, the national guides to oral and written examinations in public schools and the local examination syllabuses. The instructional level is how teachers plan and deliver the curriculum to pupils. It is on this level that the final decision is made over what is delivered in the classrooms. Circumstances such as available resources and teaching skills would be decisive factors along with the teacher's education and what priority religious education has in the general school agenda. The experiential level is the curriculum that is internalized and made personal: its effects of the individual learner. In Greenland the experiential level is the effects of religious teaching on the individual learner (Bråten 2013).

The societal level of curriculum

I take the societal level very broadly and include the historical perspective in the analysis of the societal level of curriculum.

A short history of ancient Greenland

Greenland is the biggest island in the world (2,175,600 sq. km., four times the size of France). The land is placed geographically in North America, but historically, politically, economically and culturally, this cold and sparsely populated island¹ with an enormous ice cap in the middle that leaves only the shores uncovered, is closely connected with Europe. At the end of the tenth century the south-west part of the then unpopulated island was colonized by Scandinavians (Norsemen) who settled as pastoral peasants – no corn can be grown to maturity in Greenland. The Norsemen, who penetrated no further north than latitude 64 degrees, lived for more than four hundred years in Greenland as a Christian free state run by chieftains and from 1261 as a seaborne part of the kingdom of Norway.² Ecclesiastically, Greenland was an independent bishopric from the 1120s, the most distant province of the Roman Pope and the first foothold of Christianity in the American hemisphere. Around 1200, two hundred years after the arrival of the Norsemen, the neo-Eskimos, who hunted seals, walruses and whales, crossed the narrow Smith Sound from what today is Canada and entered the far north of Greenland, whence they moved slowly south. The Eskimos and the Norsemen had some contact, in fact they were the first from the Old and the New World to meet, but only for trading and other peaceful purposes. In the fifteenth century the Norsemen disappeared from Greenland as a result of the European contraction after the Black Death, leaving churches, houses and fields behind them. Shortly after, possibly already before the end of the fifteenth century, Eskimos coming from the north crossed latitude 64 degrees and settled as hunters, where the Norsemen used to live; the pastoral life of the Norsemen was not taken up by the Eskimos, one of the reasons being that cattle, sheep and goats, the principal animals of pastoral agriculture, cannot survive in the wild in Greenland and therefore disappeared with their Norsemen masters; the Eskimos, who came from the big, cold areas, did not bring any domestic animals except the dog.

Greenland, with its steep cliffs, impressive icebergs and amazingly green pastures was never forgotten in Norway, and throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were successive plans for the recolonization and re-evangelization of the old Norwegian “tax-land.” From 1536, when a Danish-Norwegian union was created with Copenhagen as its common Danish-Norwegian federal capital, the dream about recreating the old Norwegian Arctic empire under the Polar Star also became a

¹ Today, 55.000 people live in Greenland, which corresponds to the population of a small provincial town in Europe. The present population is five times bigger than it was 100 years ago when it was 11.000 and ten times bigger than in the 1720s, when, according to the best estimates, it was about 5.500.

² For the history of Greenland see Finn Gad (1970-83) and Axel Kjær Sørensen (2007).

Danish dream. This was the historical background for three ships leaving the Norwegian town of Bergen in May 1721, bound for Greenland, with heavy cargoes of building materials, food and other provisions. The leader of the expedition was the newly appointed “royal missionary,” Hans Egede (1686–1758), a Norwegian priest who for years had wanted to go to Greenland to convert the Eskimos and find the old Norse population that he and many contemporaries believed must be living in temperate fertile valleys behind the ice of East Greenland. The aim of the costly expedition was to regain Greenland for God and for Norway as a part of the twin-kingdom of Denmark and Norway. After a difficult voyage through the ice-packed Davis Strait, two of the three ships reached Greenland on July 3rd 1721. On board was Hans Egede with his wife, four children and nearly a hundred sailors and workmen. They anchored at the Island of Hope on the northern line of the old Norse settlement, not far from the present town of Nuuk, the principal city and capital of modern Greenland.

Religious Education and the formation of a national Christian identity

Religious teaching and education in Greenland goes back to Hans Egede in the 18th century. The efforts of Hans Egede and his many followers to Christianize the Greenlanders (Inuit) were – as might be expected from a Protestant missionary – closely connected with efforts to teach the population to read and write (Kjærgaard 2011). The first printed work in Greenlandic, an ABC-book published by Hans Egede 1739, ends with the Lord’s Prayer. In this manner the ABC-book reveals why one should learn to read: to obtain access to the religious texts and the divine truth that the letters carry when properly arranged. Reading and – by extension – schools were the key to Christianity.

The close connection between schools and Christianity established by the Danish-Norwegian mission in the 18th century was preserved throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Reading remained, to a wide extent, reading of Christian texts, singing and music was to sing and play religious hymns, looking at art was to look at Christian pictures in textbooks and on the walls of the class-room, listening to stories was to listen to Biblical stories, and drawing was to draw Biblical characters and events described by the teacher (Kjærgaard 2010). It is probably difficult to find a place where the impact of Christianity has been more massive and more uncontested than in the small and isolated – geographical as well as linguistically – Greenlandic society until the second half of the 20th century. The critique of Christianity contained in major intellectual currents such as Marxism and Darwinism, not to mention critical-historical theology that swept over Europe and America from the middle of the 19th century, did not reach Greenland. Not because they were forbidden but because they had no public. The seal-hunters, the main body of the indigenous population, showed no interest in critique of religion. The national discourse from the middle of the 1800’s was, that the genuine Greenlander was a good sealhunter and a good Christian (Langgård 1999). Teaching religion and teaching what we today call citizenship were two parts of the same process.

Nor did the school-teachers, from late 18th century all indigenous, show any interest in critique of religion. In the beginning the school-teachers, the so-called *catechists*, who, on Sundays, also served as priests with limited rights, were educated privately by the missionaries. Later they were educated at the still existing teacher's training college *Ilinniarfissuaq* that was founded in Godthaab (Nuuk) in 1847 (Wilhjelm 1997). This change from private education to institutional education did not, however, change the general attitude of the *catechists*. In Greenland a simple, some would say naïve, Biblical fundamentalism had a monopoly status until the middle of the 20th century. It was taught in the school, and it was contested by nobody. The Church and the school were two sides of the same coin.

The official religion was Protestantism in the Evangelical Lutheran tradition. Other denominations were forbidden. Native Greenlanders who publicly converted to Catholicism were forbidden to go back to Greenland (see i.e. Lynge 2010), and there was no access to Greenland for people who wanted to propagate anything but the accepted version of Protestantism. The old Inuit belief was not forbidden but it was considered dead and inexistent except as folklore. The old Inuit myths and tales were collected and read and admired in the same way as Nordic or Classical mythologies were read and admired in Denmark and Europe (Nellemann 1969).

Greenland and the international postcolonial trends after 1950

The Second World War and the United Nation's policy concerning the phasing out of colonial possessions had consequences for the political administrator of Greenland (Beukel et al. 2010). An amendment to the Danish Constitution in 1953 made Greenland an equal part of Denmark as a county. In the years that followed Greenland went through modernization and substantial changes in the institutions of the society. The content of schools and education was gradually brought in line with Danish standards and in order to implement the changes teachers and administrators from Denmark were hired (Gam 1968).

When Greenland was integrated in the Kingdom of Denmark as a county in 1953, it was no more a closed colony with limited access. The Danish Constitution with its paragraphs on freedom of religion was extended to Greenland. This had important effects for the Church and for the school. The Evangelical Lutheran church lost its religious monopoly, other denominations and religions were allowed to enter freely, which they did immediately (Lidegaard 1993; Kjærgaard 2009). Furthermore the bond between the Church and the school, that for more than two centuries had remained very similar to what was the case in Denmark and Norway in the early 18th century was loosened. The Greenlandic school was rapidly modernized and transformed to something comparable to the Danish post-Second World War public school: new impressive buildings were raised in the bigger towns, new disciplines were introduced or strengthened in the curriculum (physics, chemistry, maths and so on), and other disciplines like music, drawing and history were "de-christianized." A considerable number of Danish teachers – many of whom were indifferent or critical to Christianity – were imported; not only to teach Danish which was now given a prominent place on

the curriculum everywhere, but also to teach many other disciplines, where the existent group of indigenous teachers were too few – or not considered sufficiently qualified (Kjærgaard 2009).

This transformation of the school necessarily took place at a cost to the old Greenlandic school with its pronounced emphasis on old-fashioned Protestant Christianity; it also had a cost to indigenous teachers who occasionally had to see themselves reduced to second-class teachers. Religion Education was kept in the curriculum, but in theologically more up-to-date versions. The results of the historical-critical theological research, that had been going on in Europe since the 18th century, were finally brought to Greenland by new textbooks. The *Old Testament*, and the story about Adam and Eve, that until 1950 had been taught as the full and only truth about the creation and early history of the world, was now presented in a less definitive fashion, although we are entitled to believe, that a number of teachers continued in the old style. Mostly, presumably, in small and remote places, just as it is known to have happened in Danish schools with only one or two teachers in remote rural districts until the end of the 1950s (Kjærgaard 2009).

In one important respect, however, the position of Christianity as a subject in the schools was not weakened: it had to be taught in Greenlandic (Gam 1953). While Danish was accepted, or even encouraged as teaching language in the schools, even in the small classes, in mathematics and other subjects, religion had to be taught in the national language. In this way religion preserved its role as a cornerstone of the national identity-creating part of the new school (Schultz-Lorentzen 1943).

We do not know very much about how religion was taught in post-1953 schools. Detailed studies of school-life in the period of rapid modernization (1953-1979) are sadly missing. Apparently – judging from memoirs and scattered information – religion with its obvious narrative qualities remained a popular and well-liked discipline (Lynge 1957). It may even have increased its popularity as rote learning that had been used extensively since the 18th century, disappeared or was reduced to a minimum (Lord's Prayer and a few other texts).

Home Rule and self Government

In 1979 Greenland became an autonomous region, a home rule territory of the Danish Realm. The Greenland Home Rule Act transferred legislative and administrative powers in particular fields to the home rule authority. The act provided for a legislative branch, *Landstinget*, and for the establishment of local government in the *Landsstyre*. The limits of Greenland's home rule were established by the fields of responsibility that could not be transferred. These included foreign relations, international treaties, defense policy, monetary policy, and areas such as the police and judiciary. Decisions concerning use and ownership of natural resources were shared jointly between Greenlandic and Danish authorities. Greenland's home rule system was not a nation-state. A large degree of control was still vested in Denmark. Greenland relied on Denmark for economic aid, ranging from half to three-fourth of its annual budget of public expenditures (Caulfield 1997; Dahl 2005; Nielsen 2001).

Nevertheless, the home rule administration assumed a long list of important government functions: direct and indirect taxes, fishing in the territory, labor relations, education and cultural affairs, social welfare, wildlife preservation, trade and competition regulation, internal transportation, housing administration, environmental protection, and health services. Moreover, although Greenland lacked independent foreign relations powers, it commented on proposed treaties affecting its interest and negotiated directly with foreign governments and participated in international negotiations on commercial issues.

Home rule leaders quickly moved to implement policies of Greenlandization, to enhance control over economic and social development. Greenland's majority Inuit population collectively was less advantaged than the Danish residents, and the intent of Greenlandization policies was to address this disparity. The first political action after the establishment of Home Rule in 1979 was the enactment of a new school statute, in which it was stipulated that the language of instruction should be Greenlandic. There was also the stipulation that the contents of the school subjects should to a greater extent be adjusted to the needs of Greenlandic society.

Greenland's desire for greater autonomy prompted the home rule government to establish a Commission on Self-Governance in 1999. On 21 June 2009, the Act on Greenland Self-Government came into force as a substitute for the Home Rule Act of 1979. With the Self-government Act, Greenland is able to take over almost all areas of competence from the Danish state, except foreign policy, defense and security, and monetary issues. While not a declaration of independence, the agreement moves Greenland much closer to full autonomy (Graugaard 2009). Transfer of power and authority is designed to be gradual and in accord with Greenland's ability to finance these government services.

Political and symbolic gains from the Act include adoption of Greenlandic as the official language and recognition of Greenlanders as a people according to international law, with the right to self-determination. Home rule and now self-government agreement have led to a resurgence of consciousness and pride among the Greenlandic population, with ramifications on language and culture as well as society and politics.

“The good school” – a cultural compatible school reform

A new school reform came into force in Greenland 2003. The legal framework for the reform was the School Act from 2002 (LTF8/2002), which has since been renewed with the School Act from 2012 (L15/2012). The reform process was initiated in 1998, when the Ministry of Education declared the need for a new educational system in Greenland. The new system should be based on language, culture, and history of its people and make a strong departure from the previous models imported from Scandinavia (Wyatt 2012: 823). The dominating perception among the leading educators in Greenland at that time was, that earlier educational reforms should be dismissed as nothing but modifications of the Danish educational system – “the Greenlandic educational system has been grounded in cultural and educational

antecedents from Denmark and elsewhere in Scandinavia, rather than building on the cultural competence and educational needs of Greenlandic students” (Olsen 2005).

Previous models from Scandinavia were declared to have been damaging to Greenlandic identity; only the few who succeeded to assimilate the dominant Danish culture succeeded. The consequence of this was a negative self-image among ordinary Greenlanders. The overall objective for the reform was to create a “culturally compatible education” covering the entire educational system including higher education. *Atuarfitsialak* – “the good school” – as the reform was called, was a message to Denmark about independence, political autonomy, and self-determination. By designing and implementing a reform on “Greenlandic terms,” the country demonstrated distance from its former political status as an integrated part of Denmark as it had been since 1953, it should be “decolonized.” One of the explicitly expressed goals of *Atuarfitsialak* was to replace Danes currently occupied in Greenland with educated Greenlanders, a Greenlandization of the workforce. Reform leaders hoped that a school system supporting Greenlandic culture and identity would in some unexplained way produce its own labor market.

With the passing of the new legislation in 2002, reform leaders very explicitly avoided a model derived from Nordic traditions because of the “difference between European and indigenous socio-cultural traditions” (Wyatt 2012: 826). After considering different models, the “Standards for Effective Pedagogy” developed by researchers from the “Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence” in California was chosen as the most appropriate in an “indigenous” Greenlandic context. This model was preferred because it focused on the “connection between education and the culture” and accordingly simultaneously was serving two purposes: it would strengthen pedagogical practices in the public school and it would promote Greenlandic culture and identity. Quite surprisingly, and perhaps slightly ironically, the ideas behind the standards for effective pedagogy are derived from a European, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s (1896-1934) socio-cultural theory, which suggested that all higher psychological functioning has its roots in social interaction. The standards are explained as principles of teaching and learning designed to help teachers to maximize classroom interactions in ways that promote the learning of concepts and higher-level skills (Tharp et al. 2000).

The pedagogical turn-around in the school reform provided an occasion to consider the content and significance of religious education in school. The church and the school had been separated since 1953, but now it was explicitly stressed, that the religious education in school should be non-confessional and non-denominational. From now the subject for religion education should be “religion and philosophy,” as stated in the Act (LTF8/2002 §10, 11, 12). According to the Act the subject is mandatory at all 10 grades in school and the formerly right to exemption from the subject was at the same time removed (lrf_nr.8-2002_bemaerk_dk: [30]-[31]).

Traditional Inuit drum dance and the church – the public debate about religion

The public debate in Greenland is often not specifically about religion and religious education. But sometimes religion gets media and public attention anyway. It happened in 2012 when the bishop and the Minister of Church and Education had invited a drum dancer to attend a church service for the all Greenlandic clergy in connection to their meeting (Høegh 2012). Behind the initiative were the Bishop of Greenland and the Minister of Family, Culture, Church and Gender. The idea behind the initiative was the experience of the integrated meeting between Christianity and indigenous Inuit culture. “It was an emotional congregation that immediately after the service commented on the new meeting. Both the participating Minister and other attendances expressed their opinions which predominantly went toward a strong, genuine and heartfelt experience” (Broberg 2012). The drum was an integrated part of everyday life in the traditional Inuit community. In Inuit religion the drum song and dance were used as an intermediary or “implement” in the shamans’ séances and in other situations where a spiritual power was desired, e.g. when using magic formulas or amulets, or when animating *tupilaat* (creatures of ill fortune, artificially created) (Hauser & Petersen 1985). The drum dance disappeared from West Greenland during the 18th centuries, a little later from East Greenland. Since the 1970s drum dance has been an object for cultural revitalization and is found in many contexts (Pedersen 2014). The drum dance has become a symbol of Greenlandic identity and culture and as a cultural element in opposition to Danish culture.

The institutional level

The institutional level is in Greenland represented by the law, the national curriculum and the national guidelines for written and oral examinations. The primary and lower secondary school in Greenland is called *Folkeskolen* (People’s school). It consists of 10 years of mandatory education. The school is divided in three levels – the youngest level comprises 1st to 3rd grade, the middle level comprises 4th to 7th grade and the eldest level comprises 8th to 10th grade.

The law

According to the Act of School in Greenland (L15/2012 §2) the main goals for the school are to support freedom of spirit and tolerance and to strengthen responsibility and cooperation. It is emphasized, that the school must provide a sound and safe learning environment that promotes the students capacity for independent and critical thinking, and support their ability to express their own opinions, attitudes and emotions. The school must create a framework for their everyday life and work, so that the child develops ability to cooperate, her sense of responsibility and her respect for others. The Act emphasizes that the entire activities of the school shall provide a basis for the student to develop knowledge and understanding of own social identity, culture and values and acquire knowledge and to develop understanding of other

cultures. In the official notes on the law it is likewise underpinned, that the school plays an important role for development of the student's social and cultural knowledge and skills and their co-responsibility in a democratic society (L_15-2012_bemaerk_dk: 16). According to the law the school thus has a dual purpose in the sense that, besides professionalization, the student also must develop as a person who can succeed in life and in a democratic society.

The Act lays down that the subjects taught in Greenlandic schools are Greenlandic, Danish, English, Social Studies, Religion and philosophy, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Personal development, Arts and Crafts. Religion and philosophy is thus included as an independent subject in the curriculum of primary and lower secondary school. It is a mandatory subject taught to all grades (1-10) in elementary school. Formerly it was possible to be exempted from the subject for e.g. religious reasons, but after the school act from 2002, this is no longer a possibility. As it is stated in the notes on the law from 2002, when the name was changed from "Knowledge on Christianity" to "Religion and Philosophy" the field will be given a broader perspective and become an academic subject in line with all other subjects in school (ltf_nr_8-2002_bemaerk-dk: [31]). As mentioned earlier, at the same time the possibility of being exempted from religious education disappeared. "It is hereby provided that instruction is not preaching, and that the students from the beginning is made clear that there are other religious beliefs, and that they deserve the same respect." Maybe you can see the statement "other religious beliefs" as an expression of a basic assumption of a largely homogeneous religious landscape in Greenland.

The National Curriculum

The learning objectives for the subjects in school are fixed by a ministerial decree (BEK 16/2003), which is supplemented in the national curriculum drawn up by the educational department under the Ministry of Education (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004, *Læreplan for mellemtrinnet* 2004, *Læreplan for ældstetrinnet* 2004). The Curriculum contains a compulsory part and an indicative part, consisting of proposals for teaching and suggestions for evaluating teaching activities and suggestions for teaching materials.

The entire curriculum is characterized by the pedagogical doxas about "responsibility for one's own learning" and the so-called shift of paradigm "from teaching to learning." Both circumstances indicate the Greenlandic educational policy is increasingly focusing on identity of the pupil both in sense of formation of personal identity and in the sense of the individual as a part of a collective identity. "The Act on the Greenlandic public school reflects some significant changes that have occurred in the way we look at children and their learning. There is thus a changed view of children and a new perspective on learning" as it is stated in the preamble of the curriculum (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004). The discourse is dominated by the idea of children as "competent," who are able to take part in shaping their own lives. Reference is made to research saying that children from birth are able to interact with adults and "the formation and development of the self is in progress." Instead of

looking at children as passive objects the curriculum is seeing children as active and acting subjects. This new view of children requires a new perspective on learning. The foreword states, that learning processes should be initiated in school, where the individual student's own resources, qualifications and diversity are the driving forces. "We are talking about responsibility for their own learning and mean by this that the teacher should be the one who takes responsibility for ensuring that students gradually become able to take responsibility for their own learning" (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004)

In the general instruction to the curriculum, it is stated that for every subject the curriculum includes five equal categories, which comprises: knowledge and skills, personal competences, social and societal competences, learning- and working competences and the student's future education and career choices. All teachers in all subjects are responsible for taking account of these issues. Corresponding to these categories, the objectives for teaching in the subjects are divided into four parallel categories, which represent four different approaches within the subjects and disciplines. These four categories are knowledge and skills, the personal dimension, the social dimension, the cultural and societal dimension (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004). These categories correspond with the intentions of the Act that the school both must provide students with professional skills and form them as individuals in a community.

According to the ministerial regulations the overall objective of the subject religion and philosophy is to provide knowledge and understanding of the fact, that all people are affected by life issues, which can not be answered with a yes or no, or where the answer is not immediately given in an answer book. Progression in the subject is expressed as a "growing immersion in the religious experiences, philosophies and ethical and moral judgments that people throughout the ages have made." In continuation hereof the curriculum formulates the objective, that the subject shall "help and support student's all-round personal development based on the questions they put to life." The curriculum explains that the objectives are divided into four sections, which from different starting points illustrate the religious dimension of human life. The first section is about how teaching in religion and philosophy can develop skills, including language skills, so students manage to talk about the "big questions in life." The second section is about finding identity in a community. The third section is about the religious dimension and the relationship to others, and the fourth section emphasises understanding of contemporary Greenlandic belief and outlook, which is described as the Christian worldview, and "how this ethos affects culture and society widely understood." This section also includes comparative studies of various cultures and values (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004).

Under the heading "The subject's self-understanding" the curriculum underpins that the Greenlandic school and the Greenlandic church are two different institutions and had been since the constitution amendment in 1953. The church is to preach Christianity for its members. "Religious education in school has a different task." Teaching should give a basic knowledge of the religious and philosophical dimensions of existence on the basis of the questions people have always imagined. "And this

must be done without regarding to the prevailing confessional identity and it must be for all school children regardless of their religious affiliation.” It is stated that the subject offers itself for the students with an open and unbiased dialogue without confession ties, and the subject should help students gain insight into and respect for others faith and life view. The subject should likewise promote understanding and tolerance for diversity, but also stimulate the conscious attitudes with regard to students’ own anchorages in values and beliefs. In the end of this part, it is explained how the subject fits in the school’s overall objective, “which places the student at the center.” The main feature of the religion and philosophy is that the student can find identity as an individual and as an active partner in the community in and outside school. The subject therefore has a wide range of functions: “to convey tradition, to build identity and to give encourage and insight to dialogue on life issues from the students’ own merits” (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004). What is expressed in these general descriptions of the subject is, that religion and philosophy in school is thought to deal with identity. It’s about the “religious dimension of life” and those existential and philosophical questions, man is assumed to hold at all times and all places. This way of looking at Religious Educations relates more to learning from religion as life interpretation than to learning about religion and religious practice (Grimmitt 1987) .

When it comes to the specific content of the subject, the learning objectives for religion and philosophy are divided into five categories: “Christian studies”, “Inuit studies”, “other religions and philosophies”, “philosophy and ethics” and “aesthetics” (BEK 16/2003). Inuit religion is a new category in the subject from 2002; formerly teaching in Inuit religion was part of the curriculum of the subject history and was taught as an integrated part of learning about the old Inuit society in Greenland and the Arctic. According to the regulations the five categories are equal. However, when it comes to a closer description there is a difference between the categories. Considering Christianity it is said that the objective of the instruction is that students should gain understanding of the fact that “Christianity has a special significance for the Greenlandic culture” (*Læreplan for ældstetrinnet* 2004). At the same time the ministerial regulations say that “it is expected that students can assess and apply the Inuit religion and culture as an element of personal identity, self-esteem and spiritual growth.” The regulations further read that “the pupils should achieve the knowledge to understand how the religious dimension affects the perception of life in the individual human being and in its relations to others,” as well as developing an understanding of the significance of religion and life views as “cultural heritage” and as an important condition for faith, moral, views on society and interpretation of life. In the end it reads, that pupils shall gain insight into how different societies and cultures are based on religious or philosophical beliefs and values.

If we can conclude anything concerning the institutional level of curriculum, it is that the subject religion and philosophy is supposed to play a very important role in the identitymaking process both of the individual student and the community as a whole. The curriculum talks about Christianity as a cultural heritage with specific significance for the Greenlandic society. At the same time the curriculum emphasizes that the aim of teaching about Inuit religion is that students should employ it as an

element in their build-up of personal identity, self-value and spiritual growth. Besides these elements the subject is part of the general formation of the students as harmonious, tolerant and participative citizens. The place of Inuit religion in the curriculum of religion and philosophy can be seen as a recontextualization (Bernstein 1996; 2000) of political and educational debates in Greenland in the postcolonial process and reflects important part of the national imaginary (Schiffauer et al. 2004). The societal level of curriculum is reflected in the institutional level of curriculum in that it talks about Christianity as an almost inherent part of Greenlandic culture and Inuit religion as point of departure of searching for personal identity. The subject described in the ministerial guidelines and the national curriculum thus points in several directions. The contents points on the one side towards a so-called objective and academic knowledge of religion, on the other hand, there is a pointed element of cultural, religious and moral upbringing.

The instructional level and the experiential level

The instructional level includes how teachers plan and deliver the curriculum and the experiential level corresponds to how learners receive the curriculum and make it personal (Bråten 2013). There are not many studies that can shed light on the instructional and the experiential levels of curriculum in religious education in Greenland. To elucidate this part of the curriculum I will use the evaluation reports on the final exams in elementary school and some interview material from a minor study among teachers in religious education in Nuuk.

The national curriculum writes about the role of the teacher, that the changed view on the learning objectives and the new view of working methods in the reformed school make different demands on the teachers. This implies, as it is said, that the teacher must realize that childrens' religious quest does not begin with a religion's belief, but is based on students' own life problems. "Experience shows that, for example, a Bible-centered teaching in Christian studies among children and adolescents often engenders a notion that religious life is somewhat isolated, and thus perceived as detached from other life context." The methodological approach must therefore be based on an openness of the trainer. The teacher should dare to "go with the game" and help students find a starting point for his own, and then inspire them to work on (*Læreplan for yngstetrinnet* 2004).

Since 2007 there has been both oral and written examinations in religion and philosophy. The written test consists of multiple-choice and of a free response. The national results of the written tests are discouraging. Many students do not pass, and those who pass, gets very low marks (*Karakterdatabasen – afsluttende prøver*). It is common in the examiners' report that they find too many responses characterized by a lack of academic knowledge, a lack of reflection and thinking and ability to go in depth with the questions. Likewise many students find it difficult to justify attitudes. A student is quoted for answering: "I cannot answer that question, we do not usually talk about these things" (*Evalueringsrapport Religion og Filosofi* 2013: 15). The

examiners recommend that teachers in the classroom work on getting students to reflect and respond critically to texts, statements and attitudes, make comparisons and express their own (justified) attitudes and opinion. They recommend that teachers support class discussion where students learn to relate to different topics, justify and argue for and against (21). We do not know whether the teachers are already doing this, but in this case it is certainly not sufficient according examiners views.

Interviews with school principals and teachers working in religion and philosophy may illuminate some of the reasons for the poor performances of the students. As a pilot study, in April and May 2013 two interviews with school principals and four focus group interviews with teachers were undertaken. All interviews are from the capital Nuuk and therefore can not be said to be representative of the whole country, but they may help to identify some trends. The school leaders express that they in principle consider all subjects in school to be equally important as the major subjects, that is, for example, Greenlandic, English, mathematics. However, they at the same time said: "Of course, the main subjects are more important because it is these students get to use when they need and education in the future." Although they consider religion and philosophy to be an important subject in relation to students' personal development and formation, they focus more on the tools that students, in their view, are going to use the most in the future. This view is reflected in the way teachers are assigned subjects and classes. Many of the teachers who teach religion and philosophy, are not trained in the subject. A preliminary survey among the Greenland schools shows that the vast majority of teachers in religion and philosophy are not trained teachers of the subject. In scheduling, classes in religion and philosophy are often taught at the end of the day when students are tired. The subject is also downgraded by the individual teacher. Thus, says one teacher interviewed: "I will admit that I have to prioritize when I have so many lessons a week, I give lower priority to religion and philosophy, although yes, I know it's an important subject that also is about formation." The interviews reveal that there are big differences in how teachers perceive students attitude to the subject. Those who were trained in the subject, generally considered that the students were very interested in the subject. The problem was too few lessons and the lessons' location at the end of the day. In contrast, those who were not educated in the subject, believed the students had no particular interest in religion and philosophy.

Concluding remarks

It is obvious that the Greenlandic authorities here at the beginning of the 21st century want to use religious education as a mean to provide the population with a feeling of self-confidence and identity. So religious teaching has been used since the 18th century, where the Greenlanders were transformed from a number of scattered groups along the Western coast of the big Arctic island into an imagined community, a "people", with a common written and spoken language, a common religion, a

common history and common traditions materialized not only in the famous national dress, that was created in the 19th century, but also in a common folklore and a treasure of myths, reminding about the deep past before Christianity. Since the decolonization process began in 1960s the traditional Inuit religion and culture has experienced a cultural revitalization moving into the national imaginary of the Greenlanders. Both these traits here reflected in the national curriculum for Elementary school in Greenland and for the subject religion and philosophy this means that Christianity and Inuit religion represent a dual cultural heritage as background for students to experience the religious dimension in life. Religious educations in Greenland still seems to be part of the complex mix of identity search, identity struggle and identity politics, although it seems that there is a gap between the wishes expressed on the societal and the institutional level on the one side and what is practiced and experienced on the instructional and the experiential level of curriculum. The reasons behind this gap needs to be explored further.

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