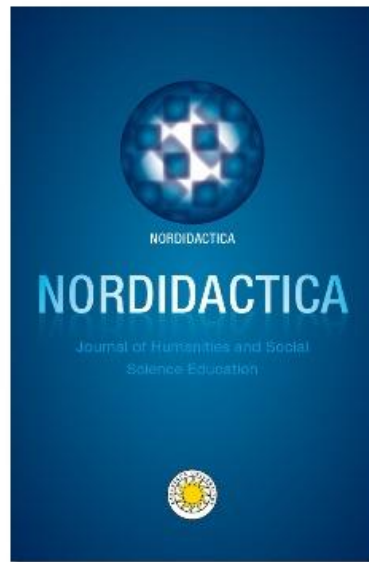


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Religious Education research in welfare state Denmark. A historical and institutional perspective on an epistemological discussion

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Abstract: The article deals with forms of knowledge and types of research interests in scholarly work on Religious Education at the primary and lower secondary levels in Denmark throughout the heyday of the welfare state from the 1960s and up until the 2000s, when the welfare state model not least with regard to education was in transition. The point of departure is the work and oeuvre of K.E. Bugge, for many years – and remaining until now – the last professor of Religious Education in Denmark, namely at the Royal Danish School of Education (Danmarks Lærerhøjskole) which reorganized as Danish University of Education in 2000. The article situates his doctoral dissertation “The school for life. Studies concerning the pedagogical ideas of N. F. S. Grundtvig” (1965) in its institutional context and compares the forms of knowledge it produced with three PhD dissertations defended during the 2000s and thus in a changed institutional field. Drawing on the conceptual understanding of the field of educational sciences deriving from Hofstetter and Schnewly (2002), the article analyzes ways of doing research in and related to Religious Education and the scholarly disciplines involved. Focus will be on the relation between the academic disciplines studying religion and the educational sciences in their many disciplinary forms and on the relation between the field of sciences and the field of educational practice.

KEYWORDS: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RESEARCH, EPISTEMOLOGY OF SUBJECT MATTER DIDACTICS, INSTITUTIONALIZATION, PROFESSIONALIZATION, ACADEMIZATION, POLICY

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The scholarly study of Religious Education. The landscape in Denmark, 1960s and 2000s¹

The development of Religious Education as a research discipline in Denmark can be understood as closely connected to on the one hand the institutional development of education as an object for academic study and on the other hand the professionalization of teaching and teachers. With regard to the subject matter in the *Folkeskole* – the state primary and lower secondary school – courses in Religious Education were offered at what became Royal Danish School of Education (Danmarks Lærerhøjskole), the in-service training institution for teachers since the late 19th century.² During the 1960s the subject matter first got a chair and then a Master's Degree and its own department at this institution, as was the case with other subject matters in the *Folkeskole* curriculum in the period. Since Royal Danish School of Education ceased to exist in 2000, Religious Education as a research discipline has

¹ The article is an elaborated version of a paper presented during the symposium “Epistemologies of Religious Education – Examples from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden”, Nordic Conference of Religious Education, Tartu, June 2015. The aim of the symposium was to examine different conditions for knowledge re/production concerning Religious Education in the Nordic countries and discuss how disciplines work as frames for ongoing developments of knowledge, primarily research contributions. The presenters were asked to use their own dissertation in relation to other dissertations from the country in which the presenter was institutionalized, preferably so that the dissertations discussed were from different periods of time. Alternatively, handbooks of RE didactics/pedagogy of religion could be examined. The form of this article is indebted to as well as framed according to this form. Thus this is also the reason why I analyze my own dissertation (Buchardt 2008) as one of the examples used in this article.

² The teaching of religion is included as an independent subject in the curriculum of the primary and lower secondary school and on high school level.

As for the latter, the subject is named “Religion” (Religion Studies or Religious Studies). To teach on high school level requires a master degree from the university in the subject as well as an additional in-service training course in education. With regard to the subject “religion”, many teachers today have a university degree in Comparative Religion, something which is mirrored in the state curriculum for the subject, especially since the 1985 syllabus for the classical gymnasium (today called the “stx”, abbreviation of “studentereksamen” – meaning student examination, traditionally streamed towards university admission).

On primary- and lower secondary level, the *Folkeskole*, the subject is called *Kristendomskundskab* (directly translated: Knowledge of or about Christianity). To teach in the *Folkeskole* requires a four year degree from a teacher education college, previously located at so called “seminarium”-institutions, today taking place at so called university colleges directed towards professions (the “professionshøjskole”-institutions).

In Denmark, primary- and lower secondary education and high school/Upper secondary education are thus divided with regard to not only curricular traditions, but also teacher education as well as research. For an overview of the Danish education system in a religious education perspective, see Buchardt 2014b. For an overview of religious education in high school and training of high school teachers in religion, see Hobel, 2002. For a historical account of the Danish high school institution, including the role of religion, see Haue, 2003, e.g. pp.359ff. Main focus in this article will be on research in the *Folkeskole* subject *Kristendomskundskab*.

gradually become institutionally homeless. However, some dissertations – as well as handbooks in the didactics of Religious Education – have since been produced; for instance, three dissertations were defended during the 2000s.

At present, research in Religious Education – when actually conducted – takes place at or connected to university departments for the educational sciences as well as in the sciences or academic disciplines of religion – Comparative Religion and Theology. However, no specific professorship or associate professorship – the tenured university positions in the Danish university system – has been assigned specifically to Religious Education since the dissolution of Royal School of Education. Also, research and developmental projects are conducted at the university colleges (“professionshøjskoler”), the institutions hosting teacher education since 2007, where the so-called *seminarium* institutions were merged (mainly) regionally with for instance kindergarten teacher colleges and the education of midwives (see Buchardt, 2014b for an overview). On the one hand, Religious Education research and development of didactics of religion have thus not ceased. Research and developmental projects do take place in and across the institutional field mentioned, while also associations of RE teachers (school teachers, teacher educators) play an active role in developing and sustaining the field, something which has been the case since the early 20th century (Bugge, 1979, pp.47ff). On the other hand, as a disciplinary area with a visible and institutionalized academic home one could simultaneously talk about a decline. The same is the case with the other smaller subject matters in the Danish school system such as history, art, sloyd/woodwork and geography, all subject matters into which research, developmental and reform efforts were invested during the 20th century. Also in the case of such subjects the rise and decline of the research communities of subject matters are closely connected with the rise and decline of the Royal School of Education. In this context it is important to note the significant status of this institution in its prime in light of the role it played in the development of and research basing of welfare state education in not least the 1960s and 1970s, a period where the strengthening subject matters was central in the reforms (e.g. Buchardt and Plum, 2015; 2017).

When discussing questions about the forms of knowledge behind Religious Education research focused in the Danish state-of-the-art, it thus makes sense to address and consider the institutional history behind the present situation. The purpose of this particular article is not, however, to trace the historical development of Religious Education as an academic and professional subject matter and discipline chronologically. Rather, the article takes a closer look at examples of the scholarly production from the heyday of subject matter didactics as research subjects in the 1960s in order to shed light on the epistemological structures behind the disciplinary field at present. Epistemologies, i.e. the way knowledge is structured, are in this context seen as closely related to the institutional structures on the basis of which knowledge is produced.

The article will hence be structured around a discussion of the relations between academic disciplines and types of research in K.E. Bugge’s doctoral dissertation *Skolen for livet. Studier over N.F.S. Grundtvigs pædagogiske tanker*, [The school for

life. Studies concerning the pedagogical ideas of N. F. S. Grundtvig] published and defended in 1965, in light of the institutional contexts of research in Religious Education in the 1960s. Based on this reading, the same two main themes will be discussed with regard to the first three PhD dissertations defended in the period after Royal Danish School of Education was dissolved and turned into Danish University of Education in 2000, and thus around three decades after Bugge's pioneering work. More specifically focus will be on Pia Rose Böwadt: *Livsfilosofi og pædagogik. En kritisk undersøgelse af den danske og tyske livsfilosofi med særligt henblik på disse traditioners pædagogiske egnethed*, defended at Department of Educational Philosophy, Danish Educational University in 2005, on Niels Reeh: *Religion and the state of Denmark: State religious politics in the elementary school system from 1721 to 1975, an alternative approach to secularization*, defended at Division for Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen in 2006, and finally on Mette Buchardt: *Identitetspolitik i klasserummet. 'Religion' og 'kultur' som viden og social klassifikation. Studier i et praktiseret skolefag*, defended in 2008 at Division of Educational Science, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen.

A parallel between Bugge's 1960s dissertation and the three 2000s dissertations is that they are all written by scholars with an original basis in the sciences or academic disciplines of religion: Where Reeh is a sociologist of religion, Bugge, Böwadt and Buchardt are trained theologians, all with a basis in church-, theology- and dogma history and the History of Ideas. The four dissertations in question to different degrees draw on historical perspectives, but where the sociological approach is central in Reeh's and Buchardt's dissertations, the History of Ideas perspective is central in Bugge's and Böwadt's dissertational work. Most striking, however, is the fact that though the dissertations in question all seek to qualify the interconnectedness of Religion and Education as a research topic and object, none of the dissertations prescribes instruments or approaches for pedagogical practice. With regard to subject matter didactical literature, Bugge's production was extensive, but he did not author or edit general handbooks for subject matter didactics catering to not least teachers and teacher students, the specific genre which in a Northern European context is called a "fagdidaktik(k)", "ämnesdidaktik" or "Fachdidaktik", following the naming of the academic disciplines of subject matter didactics in mainly Northern and Central Europe. In the case of Reeh, his scholarly production does not target the field of education, whereas Böwadt and Buchardt have both been part of a group of writers behind one of the subject matter didactical handbooks that has been published in different editions since 2006 (Buchardt, 2006; 2011; 2016c). This handbook does, however, claim to be not least an overview, and though with its own normativity, its main purpose is formulated as not mainly prescriptive or arguing for one specific model for religious education (e.g. Buchardt, 2016a).³ Distinctions between the field of research as the field of education in other words play a certain role with regard to

³ Concerning handbooks for subject matter didactics in a Danish context, see Buchardt, 2016b for an overview.

the dissertations in question and the scholarly productions and oeuvres that the dissertations form part of.

Drawing on the conceptual understanding of the field of educational sciences deriving from Hofstetter and Schneuwly (2002), this article will – based on the mentioned examples – explore ways of doing research in and related to Religious Education, or as we shall see, maybe just as much to Religion and Education. Focus will be on the scholarly disciplines involved in the dissertations in question: The relation between academic Theology, Comparative Religion (and its subdisciplines), the educational sciences in their many disciplinary forms and the professional field of Education.

Theoretical approach: ‘The disciplinary field of educational sciences’ and its types of research

Inspired by Bourdieu’s concept of field, the Historians of Education Rita Hofstetter and Bernhard Schneuwly suggest defining the scholarly study of education as “the educational sciences” in plural, which they conceptualize not as a discipline, but as a disciplinary field whose borders are determined not least by its relation to the professional field.

The disciplinarization of educational science is in other words dependent on the so-called “secondary disciplinarization”, and is thus deeply interwoven with the rest of the social world, not least the social and political demands on science that developed in state crafting throughout the 20th century along with the social and political demands on education (about the latter, see also Ramirez and Boli, 1997). A conceptualization of scholarly studies of education as a ‘disciplinary field’ should thus seek to capture:

“...the uncertain, manifold and moving contours of educational sciences, their interweaving with other professional and disciplinary fields, particularly evident during the period of their emergence [...]” (Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 2002, p.20, note 2).

Further, they underline that “[e]ducational sciences as a disciplinary field necessarily have their origin at a local level since they emerge in strong articulation with the needs of the educational system that is locally situated. [...] [T]hey appear when pedagogical reflection takes a disciplinary form and becomes a more and more professional and specialised function, a process we have called secondary disciplinarisation” (Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 2002, pp.18-19).

In light of this I will seek to interpret K.E. Bugge’s dissertation in relation to the dissertations from the 2000s as positions in the academic fields of Religion and Education, by tentatively focusing on relations between on the one hand academic institutionalization and teachers’ professionalization and on the other hand disciplines and forms of knowledge, and thus types of research.

In order to define or maybe rather suggest readings of forms of knowledge and types of research at stake in the dissertations in question, I draw on the framework of

K. Grue-Sørensen developed at University of Copenhagen's Department of Theoretical Pedagogy, where he became the first professor in the 1950s. I understand Grue-Sørensen's framework as an attempt to comprehend the multitude of education research based on a combined view on the form and the purpose of the research practice in order to determine how the object of research is defined in different types of education research.

In Grue-Sørensen's so-called program for "pædagogik" as the study ("lære") about upbringing, he distinguishes between on the one hand subdisciplines which describe and eventually also analyze and seek to explain their object (for instance the History of Upbringing, the Sociology of Upbringing, Comparative Education), and subdisciplines which seek to prescribe the means for their object (technical prescriptive research, for instance Psychology of Upbringing and Experimental Education) or the goal for their object (ethical prescriptive research, such as Philosophy of Upbringing). The study of upbringing (including upbringing in state institutions such as schools) is accordingly

"[...] a study that may develop in different directions depending on what basic assumptions are made. It [the study/MB] may be descriptive as well as prescriptive; but both positions are, however, of relevance to the phenomenon of upbringing, a descriptive study when upbringing is viewed as a present fact ["foreliggende kendsgerning"], a prescriptive study when it [upbringing/MB] is viewed as an assignment to be acted on" (Grue-Sørensen, 1965, p.17).

I suggest that Grue-Sørensen's program may be understood as a continuum, where actual examples of research as well as the curriculum or oeuvre of researchers can be characterized by more than one type of research or maybe rather as stretched out and positioned between different types of research and thus different types of research interests. The scheme or typology should in other words be understood as a language to describe and understand the complex multitude of object definitions and research purposes and ambitions at stake in – according to Hofstetter and Schneuwly's definition – 'the field of educational sciences', but not as a final either/or categorization.

What I am attempting in this article, then, is in other words also to understand the scholarly study of Religious Education as defined by types of research interests, and to grasp the fact that such types of research interests, in addition, may be understood in relation to the institutional frame in which they develop. Here the relation between academic disciplinarization and teachers' professionalization seems like an important perspective to be aware of, since the development of the educational sciences in the Nordic welfare states, such as Denmark, seems deeply intertwined with the growth of the state education system during the 20th century (Buchardt, Markkola and Valtonen, 2013).

“The School for Life”, 1965. Explanatory research about ideas between religion, culture and education

Royal Danish School of Education, an institution that had specialized in in-service training of teachers in Folkeskolen since the mid-19th century, received status as higher education institution in 1963. In Denmark reforms of higher education and the use of science as a tool in welfare state planning and development increased after WW2, not least from the 1950s onwards, as described by for instance historian Else Hansen et al. (Hansen and Jespersen, 2009). The new status – which for instance meant the right to grant Master’s and doctoral degrees – should be seen as a part of this development just as it meant a professionalization along with academization of the teacher profession. Besides in-service training courses it was now made possible for teachers to build a Master’s Degree from an institution with higher education status upon their four-year teachers college education (called “lærerseminarium”). The institutionalization of general didactics as well as subject matter didactics as the scientific basis for the art of teaching formed part of this (Nordenbo, 1980; 1984; 1997).

During the preceding years, several professorships had actually been appointed at Royal Danish School of Education. In 1962 systematic theologian and pastor E. Thestrup Pedersen became Professor in Kristendomskundskab (directly translated “knowledge of/ about Christianity”. Often translates as “Christian studies”), in accordance with the name of the Folkeskole subject matter. During the 1960s three additional teachers were hired in what was now established as Department for Kristendomskundskab. Later the name was changed into Department for Kristendomskundskab/Religion, which in the beginning of the 1990s became part of Department for Danish, Foreign Language and Religion (Bugge, 1979, p.142; Bugge, 1994, p.56; Thestrup Pedersen, 1988). One of the three mentioned new staff members at the department in the 1960s was K.E. Bugge, who in 1964 became so-called head of division (“afdelingsleder”) for Kristendomskundskab. In 1965 he was additionally appointed as an Associate Professor in School History. Later, namely in 1981, he was appointed Full Professor in Kristendomskundskab, after Thestrup Pedersen’s retirement, a position he held until his own retirement in 1998.

The appointments of scholarly positions in Kristendomskundskab in the mid-1960s can be seen as part of the academization of RE teaching and RE teachers, just as subject matter didactics professors were appointed in the other school subjects of the Folkeskole, as well as professors in general didactics. The chair in Theoretical Pedagogy at University of Copenhagen was no longer the only chair in educational science, as it had been since K. Grue-Sørensen’s appointment in the mid-1950s. A divide between academically based educational science⁴ (at University of

⁴ Educating full Master of Arts degrees in Theoretical Pedagogy (cand.mag., mag.art.).

Copenhagen) and profession-academically based educational science⁵ (at Royal Danish School of Education) was thus also institutionalized.

Considering this, it is, however, remarkable that Bugge's dissertation, defended in 1965 at Department of Danish Church History, Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, is mainly of the descriptive research type. Importantly, this can also be said about much of his later work on e.g. the History of Religious Education and on English RE traditions (e.g. Bugge, 1970; 1979; 1986; 1991). With regard to the latter, it is an example of Bugge's central role as a recontextualization agent (cp. Bernstein, 1990) in the distribution of the international RE-political as well as scholarly development in a Danish context. But where the latter work – the historical as well as the international – clearly can be seen a contribution to the creation of an academic knowledge base for Religious Education teachers,⁶ Bugge's dissertation is broader and more complex in its research interests and thus in its ambitions for knowledge production.

Bugge's dissertation was developed in his years as a research assistant (amanuensis) at Department of Danish Church History, founded by his teacher and mentor, the church historian and Professor Hal Koch at Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen in 1956 (see e.g. Bugge, 1969). The dissertation theme is Grundtvig's pedagogical thought which in Bugge's understanding can be summed up as school for life. This wording remarkably resembles the focus in the so-called Blue Report on curricular reform of the Folkeskole and its school subjects, issued by a Ministry of Education commission which was appointed in 1958, featuring the Grundtvigian folk high school leader and author Johannes Novrup's ideas as a central source of inspiration (Buchardt and Plum, 2015; 2017). The report was published 1961-62, meaning a couple of years before Bugge's dissertation defense.

The dissertation chronicles the way in which Grundtvig develops the position that religious belief should not be a school subject, but only a church matter, and thus how Grundtvig's views on education are rather situated in his philosophy of life, namely that the living interaction or interrelatedness ("den levende vevirkning") between "the living word" and "education for life" should form the civic and national education. Danish-ness and Human-ness, in other words, take over from Christian-ness. In this interpretation Bugge follows the line from not least his church history mentor Hal Koch whose Grundtvig lectures during the German occupation of Denmark in the 1940s had a monumental impact on the national awakening.⁷ Bugge's pedagogical Grundtvig is in other words inculturated in life and nation, rather than in confession.

⁵ Educating Masters of Education, meaning two years of study in addition to four years of study at teacher education colleges (cand.pæd.).

⁶ For instance in the Master Studies in Religious Education, a degree which disappeared when the Royal School of Education was changed and later merged into Aarhus University, a process that started from the late 1990s onwards.

⁷ See further for instance Fabricius Møller, 2009; Reeh, 2012.

Another and maybe just as central purpose of the dissertation is to continue Bugge's effort on exploring the relations between Pedagogy and Theology, beginning with his first monograph in 1961 (Bugge, 1961). In the dissertation Grundtvig becomes a prism through which different types of pedagogical thinking mix with theological sources. The dissertation is thus also an exploration of the overlaps and boundaries between the two disciplinary fields in question.

The author positions himself in the relation between descriptive and explanatory research and describes his dissertation as:

".. a historiographic work with the general aim of not only describing, but also understanding the past. The systematic question about the validity of the thoughts and their logical coherence is not posed. And it must be maintained that the effort of understanding the past, which should include an attempt to determine the impact of what has happened and what has been thought, is a legitimate historiographic task, just as much as the description" (Bugge, 1965, p.21).

On the one hand, Bugge thus distances himself from systematic, normative theological as well as pedagogical philosophical work with the ambition to determine how adequate the pedagogical ideas at stake are. On the other hand, he dissociates himself from a positivist approach of pure description and thus historiography as an exact science, by approaching the issue hermeneutically. Accordingly, Bugge's dissertation may be described as a modern church historiographical work, based on textual critique and systematic source studies, where the development of ideas is situated in the life history of and the practical social demands that meet the thinker in question.

In his early scholarly efforts, Bugge thus seems to carve out a space between on the one hand the theological subdisciplines of Danish Church History and Systematic Theology and on the other hand the disciplinary field of educational sciences, more specifically Philosophy of Education and the History of Education and Pedagogy. This space can be said – in some sense – to create a distance to social demands, i.e. *pragmatic demands* to contribute to *educational instrumentalism* as well as to normative philosophical educational purposes, and thus to technical as well as to ethical prescriptions (Nordenbo, 1980; Saugstad, 2008). Finally, it may be argued that the dissertation is a study of Religion and Education rather than the study of Religious Education.

However, at the same time the knowledge production may be seen as related to the social development of professional institutions and to curricular trends, for instance the increased focus on "school" and "schooling for life" during the 1960s. Here a distinction between the dissertation as a position and the positioning of the authoring scholar might be useful. A position and the positioning of the actors respectively are in Bourdieu's sociology of the field of science to be understood as connected, though not the same (e.g. Bourdieu, 2004). The field of science in a Bourdieuan sense can furthermore be described as an axis of dependence vs. independence in relation to other social fields. In light of the interpretation of forms of knowledge and types of research in Bugge's dissertation, it might make sense to describe the dissertation as a

position in the autonomous part of the field of the educational sciences, but at the same time produced by an actor positioned in a part of the field which is more dependent on pragmatic and political demands. It is, however, important to note that the didactical and subject matter didactical research and higher education communities at the Royal School of Education moved quite independently of policy and political demands from the state bureaucratic field. The change of the department name reflected in the adoption of “Religion” as part of its title can for instance be said to herald a distance and an autonomous profile, since the school subject matter was called *Kristendomskundskab* (and still is). The change of name of the Master’s Degree from “*Kristendomskundskab/Religion*” to “*Religion/Livstolkning*” (the latter meaning “life interpretation(s)” or “life views”) in 1990 suggests the same pattern (Bugge, 1993).⁸ Though the syllabus for the master study was even more so than the former directed towards pedagogical practice, the name change signals that the academic community at Royal School of Education pulled in other directions than the political field, and thus claimed an independent agency. Religious Education research at the Royal School of Education can in other words be said to have attained a high degree of independence from political pragmatic demands, but at the same time to be closely interdependent with teachers’ professionalization on microlevel. However, the knowledge production of Bugge’s dissertation cannot be understood as separated from the political and mental context of its time: Its relation to macro-political tendencies should be considered as well, as it is generally the case when dealing with science and scholarly productions in the modern welfare state.

Three dissertations from the 2000s: Descriptive explanatory research on practiced ideas/ideologies between religion, culture and education

In light of this tentative analysis of the forms of knowledge, types of research and institutional conditions of Bugge’s 1965 dissertation, how can the three 2000s dissertations then be described? I will now turn to a brief description of the dissertations in question and go on to discuss the pattern in all four dissertations contextualized institutionally in order to suggest new questions for how to understand the disciplinary and thus epistemological conditions for Religious Education research to be found in the Danish cases in two historically and socially different institutional settings.

Pia Rose Bøwadt: *Livsfilosofi og pædagogik. En kritisk undersøgelse af den danske og tyske livsfilosofi med særligt henblik på disse traditioners pædagogiske egnethed* [Philosophy of life. A critical examination of the Danish and German philosophy of life with particular attention to the pedagogical suitability of the traditions] was as mentioned defended in 2005 at Department of Educational Philosophy, Danish

⁸ In addition, the name change might be understood in light of what Bøwadt describes as the shift “from religion to life”, Bøwadt, 2007, p.178f.

Educational University, the new university institution created after Royal Danish School of Education was dissolved. At the time, the subject matter didactical departments and areas at the former teacher in-service and higher education institution had been merged into a so-called Department of Curriculum Studies, replacing the disciplinary German-Nordic tradition of Didaktik with the Anglo-Saxon curriculum tradition, and making subject matter research less distinctive and visible (cp. Westbury, 2000). The new university institution consisted of further three departments: Besides the Department for Educational Philosophy a Department for Educational Psychology and a Department for Educational Anthropology. Accordingly, the dissertation is also a broader study, disciplinarily situated in the History of Ideas, following how German and Danish Philosophies of Life (Lebensphilosophie, Livsfilosofi) have helped shape Danish school traditions. Though Religious Education and its subject matter didactics form part of the study, they are exactly only part of it (Böwadt, 2005. See also later elaborations, Böwadt, 2007; 2009). Though mainly a descriptive study, Böwadt's work provides prescription for teaching practice, though in a negative sense: The conclusion warns against the use of philosophy of life in school pedagogy (including Religious Education) due to what is defined as the anti-intellectualism and vitalism and thus the totalitarian roots of the philosophical tradition in question. The dissertation can thus be said to be situated between descriptive, critical analytical and ethical prescriptive types of research.

The two dissertations from University of Copenhagen's Faculty of Humanities differ from the first in this sense. Both have – in different ways – roots in sociology and in different ways relations to history, and can thus both be seen as having explanatory ambitions with regard to education, rather than prescriptive ones. Also, both dissertations seek to produce knowledge about schooling, which points out how the school institution contributes to society in general and how school, more specifically Religious Education, should be understood as part of social and societal production and development in general.

Niels Reeh's *Religion and the state of Denmark: State religious politics in the elementary school system from 1721 to 1975, an alternative approach to secularization* is a historical study of the relation between the external relations of the state, the shifting forms of the state and the internal politics of school and religion. It is a theory-driven analysis that follows the broad lines of Religious Education in schools from 1721 to 1975 inspired by socio-ethnological Hegelian theory. The broader ambition of knowledge production is to contribute to and challenge the secularization thesis in the disciplinary field of sociology of religion. It is thus not a scholarly work that aims at contributing to the educational sciences (though it can certainly be said to do so) (Reeh, 2006. See also Reeh, 2009a;b).

Mette Buchardt: *Identitetspolitik i klasserummet. 'Religion' og 'kultur' som viden og social klassifikation. Studier i et praktiseret skolefag* [Identity politics in the classroom. 'Religion' and 'kultur' as knowledge and social classification. Studies in a school subject on classroom level] (2008. See also Buchardt, 2010; 2014a) labels itself as curriculum sociology and -history, and thus descriptive as well as explanatory. It draws on the social and historical epistemological tradition deriving from Foucault

and Bourdieu. Despite being theoretically distant from hermeneutics, and being based on not least observation material from educational practice (in Religious Education), it does not, however, appear to be far from Bugge's approach. Despite distancing itself from politically pragmatic demands and prescriptions, the dissertation takes its point of departure in a heated educational political topic: The presence of so-called Muslim pupils in the Danish state school, and the way this is handled micro-politically on classroom level.

Like Bugge's, Buchardt's dissertation is just as much a study of Religion and Education as a study of Religious Education. Unlike Bugge's, however, the dissertation was – though written by a trained theologian – neither defended at the Faculty of Theology nor in relation to academicized in- and post-service teacher education, but at the remains of Grue-Sørensen's old Department for Theoretical Pedagogy, University of Copenhagen.⁹ Hence, institutional reasons can also be said to exist for the dissertation distancing itself from on the one hand educational pragmatism and on the other hand religion as well as Theology in an inclusive sense (about the scientific basis for the institution, see e.g. Grue-Sørensen, 1965; Callewaert, 2007). It may be argued that Reeh's dissertation, developed and defended in a research environment of Comparative Religion, does not need such positioning. The disciplinary battles of which the dissertation is part are rather the critical discussions about the limits of the concept of secularization, a discussion that has gained momentum since the 1990s (see e.g. Swatos and Christiano, 1999; Buchardt, 2015b; 2016b). An interesting parallel between the two dissertations – Buchardt's and Reeh's – might however be that neither is positioned in the classical discussion between Theology as a discipline claiming religious truth and Comparative Religion as claiming neutrality. The dissertations thus seem indirectly to position themselves beyond such discussion, thus presupposing the fading scientific relevance of such discussions without addressing the question openly.

Conclusion: RE-Research epistemologies in light of institutional history

Read as positions on the overlapping fields of Theology and Comparative Religion and the educational sciences in Denmark, the analysis paints a picture of research in Religious Education in Denmark as distancing itself from pragmatic agendas of political and/or instrumental character and as well as to philosophical determination, but at the same time being closely related to the political challenges from the education system. Theology and the educational sciences seem somehow closer to dependence on other social fields than Comparative Religion, when read from the dissertations in question. In this context it is impossible to not consider the pragmatic and professional relationship between theology as research discipline(s) and higher

⁹ Today: Division of Educational Science, Department of Media, Cognition and Communication.

education topic and its role in educating academics for professional positions as pastors in the Evangelical-Lutheran Folk Church, but also the historical relationship between church and school should be considered (Buchardt, 2011; 2015a; 2017). Though the above mentioned observation about the state dependency vs. autonomy of the dissertations is of course only a weak indication, it might make up the basis for posing questions for further exploration and consideration: Are the classical modernist discussions and the ditto distinction between Theology as seeking religious truth vs. Comparative Religion as claiming religious neutrality missing the socio-political situation of the sciences and their relation to professionalization, and thus the institutional history? What is it possible to further understand about the conditions for doing Religious Education research and thus also for producing for instance research-based didactical handbooks if we focus more on the question of pragmatic demands versus teachers' practice versus dependence/independence of research, instead of focusing at religious (or ethical) truth claims vs. objective science claims? And what can we learn about the field of religious education research and thus the conditions for knowledge production about religious education if such focuses are brought together? Such questions might become even more relevant in the years to come, since subject matter didactics in Denmark seem to be increasingly replaced by broader studies and development of learning processes in a general sense, increasingly seeking to prescribe the often same instruments for how to teach all subject matters, regardless of the subject matter content and its historical and social foundation.

First and foremost, the analysis points to the impact of the institutional history on RE-research, and thus the perspective of the social historical study of the research field itself and its relation to and embeddedness in not least the education system. Also when it comes to the teaching of religion in school, and the scholarly knowledge production concerning the latter, such practices – research practices as well as education practices – should not only be understood in light of different types of truth claims and/or the different academic ideologies expressed, but in relation to the social and historical conditions within which they are situated. When it comes to states, such as Denmark, where education as well as specific religious communities, in this case the Evangelical Lutheran church, forms part of the state, these questions – regarding the knowledge areas religion and education, especially when intertwined – will be intimately connected to the development of state institutions. In addition, in the welfare state model as it evolved in Denmark since especially the 1950s it might make sense to consider the shifting state strategies and state-formulated role of science and academic knowledge in which scholars have been embedded and have been navigating within, not least when it comes to education and education research. Hence, an institutional and welfare state historical perspective can be an approach – among others – in order to understand the epistemologies of research in religion and education, situated as it is between academic disciplines and educational institutions as well between academic, professional and political demands.

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