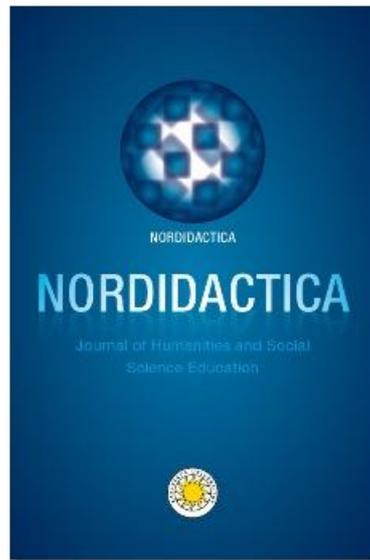# Qualifying didactic reflection in religious education through a model for religious competence

Kirsten M. Andersen & Lakshmi Sigurdsson

Nordidactica

- Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education

2019:4

Qualifying didactic reflection in religious education through a model for religious competence

Kirsten M. Andersen

University College South, Haderslev

Lakshmi Sigurdsson

University College Copenhagen

Abstract: Religion is a vast phenomenon, consequently the core elements in formal religious education are equally difficult to limit. Even though a national curriculum narrows down the scope of content to a certain extent, it is apparent how RE incorporates a whole range of methods and approaches. This article departs from another perspective, namely the fact that school is not exclusively responsible for religious education and formation. It raises the question of whether and how formal teaching from the perspective of teachers in school and vicars in church contributes to the specific pedagogical task of competence and authoritativeness (Bildung). One of the results of an action research project: 'Educating (Bildung) towards religious competence' is a fourfold model for developing analytical approaches to RE didactics based on the concept of competence/authoritativeness. With this model it is possible to connect knowledge of RE with general pedagogical and didactic reflection in the context of both school and church. In the article, we offer reflections on possible ways to strengthen the connection between RE research and teaching. The aim is to connect practical teaching experience with theoretical reflection, both knowledge of didactics and religious content knowledge. In recent times the ideal of formation for RE has understandably focused on competences for diversity and inter-religious understanding. The four-fold model for religious competence is our attempt to widen the scope and perspective of formation in schools.

About the authors: Kirsten M. Andersen, Senior lecturer, Ph.D., Institute for Teaching, University College South, Haderslev

Lakshmi Sigurdsson, Senior lecturer, MA and M.Ed, Department of Teacher education, University College Copenhagen (KP)

The necessary dialogue between theory and practice in RE

In the field of teacher education, the problem of theory and practice is a difficult and constitutive one. The aim of this article is to keep both theory and practice in focus and argue for an obligating dialogue between the two. There is a need in religious education for the sort of pedagogical research that makes the effort to ask how pedagogical problems of thinking and action confront theory and practice? What kind of worries and reflections will arise from a theory, which is enlightened by practice, oriented to reflect practice in a critical manner and vice versa to proof and correct the theory with experience from practice (Benner, 1980, 485)?

We were curious to investigate from a practical level the content and aims of formal teaching of religion both RE at school and preparation for confirmation at church. What is good teaching from the point of view of the teachers and vicars? What do they set out to do? What kind of content knowledge do they choose and what are the arguments in the progression of the task? School and church are obviously two different institutions with different aims. Still, they share framework and history of a secular age with common ideas of individuality, knowledge, education etc. (Taylor, 2007). In other words, religious education takes place in a framework of secularization, individualization and diversification through globalization and hybridization of religious ideas and expressions. We expected both the different aims and the shared secular context to have an impact on the religious education given in the two different contexts. Didactic literature for RE in Denmark tends to distinguish the two kinds of formal religious education (church and school) by the distinction of preaching/ not preaching or confessional/ non-confessional. In the project at hand, we attempt to investigate these basic assumptions from a didactic angle and the actual teaching.

In the academic year 2017-2018, we completed an action research project with the participation of four RE teachers from different comprehensive schools, *Folkeskolen*, and four vicars preparing classes for confirmation in the Evangelical Lutheran church, *Folkekirken*.

The aim was to examine formal religious education in school and church with a developmental approach. We were curious to find out what they would like to develop and why. For that purpose, we choose the methodology of action research, as it opened the possibility to work in relationship with the practitioners. We are far from alone to register a need for research that brings scholars in teacher education and teachers to collaborate in research projects in order to increase knowledge and qualify the study of RE in teacher education (Jackson, 2009; Skeie, 2010; Johannesen, 2015; Haakedal, 2015). Keeping pedagogical theory and practice apart is in many ways a comfortable division (Benner, 1980). The risk, however, is that pedagogical theory ignores the complexity of thinking and acting that invariably is part of practice. Accordingly, action research which from the beginning admits this experienced knowledge to the practitioners is an appropriate way of research for an obligating dialogue and development of theory on pedagogical thinking and acting.

In action research, we attempt to follow the questions and challenges of experienced practitioners, in this case their suggestions for content, scope and aims in religious

education. Furthermore, we wanted to place this RE action research project within a framework of general pedagogy. For this reason, we introduced the concept of Educating (*Bildung*) towards religious authoritativeness / competence as a framework for shared reflection. Authoritativeness / competence is a translation of the Danish *myndighed* (German: *Mündigkeit*), rooted in Kantian philosophy of education. As it is difficult to find an adequate English translation, we have chosen the combination of authoritativeness/ competence. We use it as a pedagogical concept, and not in relation to the authority of a church or other religious institution.

The basic research question of the project was, "What do teachers and vicars regard as good teaching and do they consider how they contribute to the pupil's competence in religion and authoritativeness of the self?" One of the outcomes was a fourfold model: Educating (*Bildung*) towards religious authoritativeness/ competence. The model may work as a catalyst for reflection and dialogue of RE among teachers, teacher students and teacher educators. The analysis of the material generated in the process opened new ideas on how to qualify skills and reflection on theory and practice with students in teacher education. In the final part of the article, we will return to the relevance of the project for teacher education.

The methodology: The art of teaching and the community of practice

The investigation of teaching is indeed quite complicated, as teaching is a situated action with many levels of communication, and therefore difficult to examine or measure. The ideal in action research is a principle of equality and equal participation of researchers and practitioners with the intention of investigating the knowledge generated in the field of practice. Some researchers apply the Aristotelean concept of *fronesis* – the exercise of practical wisdom to describe the method (Rönnerman, 2013, 18). Instead of taking the role of the observer, analysing from a distance, action research takes place in a 'community of practice' with a dynamic interaction between theory and experience. The aim is to get as close as possible to the object of research (Tofteng & Husted, 2012, 362) - in our case the field of religious education in school and church.

The community of practice in action research is usually a group of people that share the same field of action in their daily life, such as a school, an organization, or a local community. In the case at hand, the eight practitioners did not share the same physical space in their daily work. They work at two different institutions and in eight different locations, four churches and four schools, placed in two different areas of Denmark. Greater Copenhagen and Southern Jutland, just as the two researching associate professors come from two different institutions. What we share is a more abstract pedagogical-didactic field of action, which is the field of religious education. In order to obtain some similarities in the study the group of pupils and candidates for confirmation are in the age group 12-15 years (grades 6-9).

Initially, we structured the collaboration in two different groups, one for teachers and one for vicars, thus respecting the different aims and frames of school and church.

In that sense we established two communities of practice. As we went along, all participants expressed an interest in bringing both groups together, thereby gaining the opportunity to consider cross-professional perspectives (which could be relevant for further investigation in a follow up). The eight practitioners planned and completed a teaching action of their own choice, linked to the framework of educating for religious authoritativeness/ competency. Through the project there was an agreement on a high degree of transparency, thus all collected material was shared and made available to everyone in the project. We also took care to establish clarity of the different and shared responsibilities of the researchers and the practitioners.

At the outset of the action research project, we choose to identify religious authoritativeness/ competence as four interconnected aspects:

1) independently take position
2) language for existential limit situation / condition
3) competence of interpretation
4) competence of diversity

At the initial meetings, the two groups of teachers and vicars were invited to reflect on the concepts of maturity, authoritativeness, and empowerment (*modenhed, myndighed og myndiggørelse*). Largely, the two groups shared a common understanding. However, the teachers were familiar with the pedagogical terminology of the concepts, whereas the vicars reflected the concepts to the human lifespan and used organic metaphors. Once confirmed, a person can legally become a godparent. One vicar preferred humility to authoritativeness and reflected on the different qualities of human and divine authority. Following the initial reflections, each participant defined a problem or question to focus on in the project and placed this within an action research spiral (cf. Rönnerman, 2013) in order to define a teaching experiment to try out. In this structure, the four aspects of religious authoritativeness/ competence served as an inspiration and general framework for the teaching experiments, but not as a mandatory point of reference.

Through the project, the eight participants kept a portfolio, and by the end each teacher and vicar produced a description with reasons and reflections on their teaching action in order to extract the general knowledge and insights from the specific actions. During the project we met (in separate groups of teachers and vicars) at local seminars as well as two external seminars. They were the frame for mutual response on project development. But they also gave each community of practice time and space for more informal talks on didactics, pedagogy and the role as teacher or vicar.

In the final analysis of the eight projects and the generated material, we returned to the four aspects of RE, which we had defined in the beginning of the project. This led to two realizations. First, that the four aspects were not enough to capture the basic forms of didactic and learning of the action processes. We needed forms of analysis to match the action of teaching. Still we were looking for a combination of teaching as action combined with the content knowledge of RE and the pedagogical aims of school and church. In combination with two models for analysis of basic forms of didactic and learning (Christensen, Marxen, Skovmand, 2015; see fig. 1 & 2) the material and the eight teaching actions were analysed and evaluated to find out how and to which extend

the four aspects were present in each teaching experiment. Second, the analytical work led to the structure of the four aspects in a model that combines a horizontal and a vertical axis in order to clarify the relation and interplay between them.

As the analysis of the material of the project progressed, the urge to communicate the results of the action research project and to find ways to use the results in teacher education grew likewise. We wanted to create material for teacher education, to find ways to use it as a kind of steppingstone to reflect and talk about teaching practice, didactics and pedagogy of RE. The development of a fourfold model with the basic aspects of RE is a response to this urge. Teaching is an ephemeral exercise. That is why models may function as a tool to maintain a dialogue of the matter. In combination with the two other models for analysis and reflection of didactic and learning, the fourfold model of basic aspects of RE is a tool for analysis and evaluation.

Action research is a complicated process of cooperation, and therefore it is difficult to make a final account. At the end, the material is open to several interpretations (Tofteng & Husted, 2012, Rönnermann, 2013, Skeie, 2013; Haakedal, 2015). In this article we have prioritized to analyse the teaching actions in order to use the material as a basis of discussion of the complicated phenomenon of teaching in religious education (Benner, 1980, Benner, 2014, Skeie, 2010). In relation to the discussion we also consider, how the teaching actions can be used as material for teacher students in order to learn from experienced teachers. In this sense the project is an attempt to create a connection between research, the field of practice, and teacher education.

The context: Religion and religious education in Denmark

For most children in Denmark the formal religious education takes place in school (82% attend the public school, *Folkeskolen*), and some children attend religious education in a church or other confessional institution as well. According to statistics 71% of Danish youth celebrated the rite of confirmation in the Lutheran church (*Folkekirken*) in 2015. The Danish constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but the Lutheran Church has a position of priority in the constitution as well as a history of close connection to the school. RE as a subject in public schools in Denmark changed in 1975 from bringing up the children within a confessional framework towards a non-confessional subject focused on knowledge about Christianity and other religious worldviews. This also marked a secularization through changes of the general aims of the school towards an emphasis on democratic formation based on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.

As the other Nordic countries, Denmark has experienced increasing cultural and religious diversity from the 1960's and onward, but the country also has a longer history of religious diversity such as the first formal recognition of The Mosaic, Catholic, and Reformed congregations dating back to 1682 granting permission for services in private homes (Andersen and Liengaard, 2007). The religious map of Denmark is a complex pattern of diversity, individualization, and high level of formal membership of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church – with 74, 7 % of the population as registered members

in 2019. In surveys, less than a fifth of Danes see themselves as 'very religious', but only 7% define themselves as atheists. Some scholars have used the label 'belonging without believing' to illustrate how members use the Church for Life-circle rituals, family traditions and identify with Christianity as a cultural norm (Iversen, 2012). Islam is the largest non-Christian religion in Denmark today with approximately 300.000 Muslim citizens, but this estimate is uncertain, as there is no formal registration of religious affiliation (Kühle & Vejrup, 2017), and Islam is characterized by inner diversity. The impact of individualization and diversity is combined with a flexible form of secularism, and the expression of relaxed as well as more strict interpretations of religion (Sigurdsson, 2007).

The complex picture is part of the conditions of practicing RE in Denmark in the sense that neither teachers nor vicars can take anything for granted in terms of religious practice, identity or knowledge of religion among children and young people. Public debates and the image of religion conveyed by the media is another factor in the preconception of religion. In public schools, the teaching of religion is included as an independent subject in the curriculum of the primary and lower secondary school, named Christianity Studies (*kristendomskundskab*). Formal aims include Christianity, Biblical narratives, philosophy and ethics on all levels; other religions must be introduced from grade 7, but teachers can include comparative perspectives on all levels. For high school, the name is Religious Studies (Andersen, 2015; Buchardt, 2014 and 2016). In primary and secondary level, there is a possibility of exemption from the subject, although the subject is mandatory, non-confessional and knowledge based. The condition for exemption is a meeting between parents and the head of the school. We do not have exact statistic for exemption on a national scale, but the estimation is that less than 2% of pupils make use of the possibility.

Bildung – Education – Competence

However, why not just stay with the didactic and subject matter of teaching religious education? Why complicate the process of action research by a reflection of the task of pedagogy? Students and teachers both need to address the question, why do we teach religion in public schools (Skeie, 2010; Lippe & Undheim, 2017). In a Scandinavian context, the answer will reflect the general aims of the public schools, as we share a tradition of defining basic values of schools on a national level (Skeie, 2017).

In German and Danish, it is possible to distinguish between Bildung (*dannelse*) and Ausbildung (*uddannelse*). Compared to the German and Scandinavian counterpart the English concept of education is somehow a devouring concept, as it covers a whole range of meanings. Education covers the aim of the teaching practice and the normative theory of formation. The Anglo-American curriculum tradition does not operate with a distinction between the two. It is the task of a pedagogical and formative endeavour to open possibilities for the pupil to become a free and responsible self, to be competent in understanding and action and to participate responsibly in community with others.

One of the presuppositions of the project was that the two different forms of religious education might contribute to this task in different ways.

Over the last decade, there has been a considerable theoretical interest to reconsider RE within the framework of general pedagogical philosophy (Huggler, 2008; Kristensen, 2008; Oettingen, 2011; Benner, 2014; Bojesen, 2014).

How can religious education contribute to the pedagogical task? How can one explain the possible connections between religion and pedagogical values? The answers to such questions touch upon current ways of dealing with enlightenment ideas for example how to deal with reason and faith. The answer is dependent upon whether one ignores or acknowledges that religion rather "belongs to what one may call the practical conditions of the world, and as such is interwoven and difficult to differentiate from questions of ethics, politics, society, culture, pedagogy and even art." (Frandsen, 2008, 8). In short terms, a theoretical reflection on religion and pedagogy is both an epistemological question and a practical matter.

On the epistemological distinction between faith and reason, Jørgen Huggler argues for the importance to reflect distinctively on the difference between faith and knowledge. But as faith gives rise to thinking, one must also consider the relationship between faith, reason and thinking. On the basic questions of human existence, Huggler reveals that pedagogy and religion reflect upon common values. Furthermore, this reflection opens the possibility to distinguish between good life, ethics and knowledge. As religion makes God a possible reference of meaning and existence, and not an actual positive fact, the good life may be unfolded in different interpretations (Huggler, 2008).

In regards of competence, other philosophers of pedagogy have emphasised some core competences in religious education. On religion as a practical matter, Jens Erik Kristensen suggests that students learn to interact in a society with religious diversity by development of a reflected competence of difference (Kristensen, 2008). Further, Alexander von Oettingen outlines three principles for the didactics of religious education (Bildung) a) A non-proclaiming teaching which widen the scope of understanding and differentiates between factuality and personal confession. b) Teach to identify and criticize religious fanatism/enthusiasm. c) As religion is a public form of communication and a lived practice, the students should be introduced to what is specific about religion and to reflect the difference between religion as personal and as public convention (Oettingen, 2011).

Dietrich Benner defines religious competence in three steps a) knowledge of religion; b) competence of interpretation; c) competence of participation (Benner, 2014).

According to Benner, education is one of six spheres of practice, including also work, politics, ethics, art and religion. A society marked by differentiation needs a general theory of education that includes these different spheres. Benner argues that a pedagogical theory for religious education should take two assumptions as a starting point:

First, that religious meaning cannot have special priority over other dimensions of meaning such as political, ethical, aesthetic or economic.

Second, that a religious horizon of meaning is essential to understand human existence and co-existence (Benner, 2014; Andersen, 2015).

In line with this recent research, our aim has been to investigate, discuss and develop religious education in relation to the broader problems of pedagogical thinking and action within the different spheres of human practice that Benner has introduced (Benner, 1980).

The project connects to this philosophical reflected demand to consider value, competence and authoritativeness within the religious field. What does it imply to have enough knowledge, skills and experience with religious questions, themes and practice in order to understand, interact and participate in society? The concept of competence is widely discussed by Benner (Benner & Brüggen, 2011; Komischke-Konnerup, 2019: Skovmand, 2019), but also in the later works by Wolfgang Klafki (Skovmand, 2018; Klafki, 1996). Some may find the combination of 'religious' and 'authoritativeness/ competence' strange or provocative. Even more so when we apply it as a framework for investigation in both institutions. We could of course modify it to 'competence in religion' or 'religious literacy', and both are certainly aspects of 'education toward religious authoritativeness/ competency', but we were searching for framework that reflected different aspects of formation in the area of religion, and could encompass the epistemological and practical discussions of RE as a pedagogical task.

The eight projects: content and analysis

The criteria for selection of participants was a positive engagement in teaching of religion or preparation for confirmation, some years of experience and an interest in didactic development. They were recruited through existing networks and personal contacts in Southern Denmark and Greater Copenhagen. Within the framework of educating towards religious authoritativeness/ competence, the eight participants defined individual research questions and chose specific teaching actions they wanted to try out. The final reports of the eight participants will be part of an educational book to be published in 2020.

After a short introduction of the themes of the eight projects, we will present some of the analytical results. The questions of the teachers are related to the impact of activities and active participation, as well as the development religious literacy. Their questions are as follows,

> "How can I through activities enhance the learners' abilities to reflect on the life worlds of others – and in that way, their own lifeworld?" (Eva, teacher of 9th grade)

> " How can I develop goals and activities that will enhance the religious and ethical authority of the learners?" (Jesper, teacher of 8th grade)

> " How can we (teacher and learners together) develop a language through which we can talk about and understand evilness?" (Jette, teacher of 8th grade)

> " How can myth (Christian and Inuit) work as a starting point for teaching the relationship between faith and myth?" (Jørgen, teacher of 6th grade)

The questions of the vicars tend to focus on different aspects of community and inclusion. Their questions are as follows,

> *"How does the 'naughty' associative subtext (sexualised language and teasing) become a constructive part of the preparation for confirmation?"* (Inge, vicar 7th grade)

> *"How can I facilitate the talk about the big life issues in the homes between children and their parents?"* (Jakob, vicar 7th grade)

> *"All learn from each other. How is it possible through dialogue and painting to make the church hall an image of a community of which each of them is the building blocks?"* (Rose Marie, vicar 8th grade)

> *"How can the confirmands experience that the private life story belongs to a larger narrative and is part of a service and worship, where they can be heard and included as the ones they are?"* (Anna Sofie, vicar 7th grade)

In the final analysis, we found that although the different aims and roles of vicar and teacher may be clear, they also have something in common. Both are trying to create a specific atmosphere, and both are trying to catch the attention of the pupils. In notes from the seminars the teacher Jesper is saying, "I enter, and I try to catch them with magic – create an atmosphere of enthusiasm. It smells a bit like rituals." Similarly the vicar, Jakob states, "I love the rituals without words and I believe they make a difference. We walked the Lord's prayer without talking. A sense of peace and deepening."

The vicar is applying a sort of profanation (Masschelein and Simons, 2013, 37-38) in a physical exercise: walking on The Lord's Prayer. To walk in silence on the prayer is an invitation to include the body and experience the impact of silence. The confirmands were left with the experience without any follow-up through questions or shared reflections. The vicar chose to let the silent ritual do the work and give space to each participant for personal reflection.

The teacher is also very consciously creating an atmosphere and attempting to catch the attention of the pupils "with magic". He is aware that teaching may lean on or gain inspiration from the structure of rituals. It is not actually a ritual, but "it smells a bit" like it. The intention here may be to obtain the sort of magic moments, described by Masschelein and Simons, when students and teachers are carried away by the subject matter and teaching becomes not only informative, but also enlivening (Masschelein and Simons, 2013, 38).

While searching for the magic moments is a general aspect of teaching, we found that in RE the teachers are very aware of this. Three of the four teachers in the project characterize RE as an exceptional subject. They see in RE a personal and existential dimension, which is not found in other subjects, because it deals with existential questions such as "Who and where you are as a human being?" The fourth teacher argued that a teacher would make that claim for any subject. The seminars with the group of teachers revealed that the relation between subject knowledge and personal values has a specific importance in RE. This may reflect the formal aims of the subject, which states that the pupils should attain "Knowledge and skills that will make them

able to understand and relate to the impact of *the religious dimension* on the view of life held by the individual and in his/ her relation to others." (Formal aims of Christianity Studies, 2019)

The teachers also experience a need to reflect more on the impact of their own attitudes and values than in other school subjects. For this reason, there is an ongoing reflection on different approaches to impartiality vs neutrality and neutrality vs. normativity (cf. Bakker & Montessori, 2016; Franken & Loobouyck, 2017). The participating teachers take different positions in relation to the ideal of being impartial or neutral. Eva emphasizes that "my personal attitudes should have no impact, but let the best arguments win. It was difficult, but I did manage to do that." Jette, initially has similar reflections in terms of "a fear of being too normative, that my own position is too obvious" But she decides on a strategy of openness about her own religious position. She is also aware of a balance, when she argues, "I can use my personal experiences, if it will enhance the discussion, but I need to stress an openness to other positions."

Normativity is manifest in a particular way according to the context of the church, as the aim is to "familiarize children and youth with the basic elements of the Christian faith and the church service and to teach them, what it means to live in a Christian faith as well as being part of the Christian community." (Formal aims of preparation for confirmation, 2014). All four participating vicars have a conscious way of integrating personal experiences and reflections, but they do this in different ways. While Jakob has created small personal narratives called Jakob-stories, Rose Marie introduces her own "history of faith", when she feels the time is right. Through the seminars for the group of vicars, we found that they all see the preparation for confirmation as something very different from a school subject. They want the confirmands to experience the church as a "free haven", where they will feel met and included without the usual demands of the school. They do not see the preparation as teaching. Inge from Copenhagen area explains, "I do not think that I am teaching them, and they are not here to learn something. It is a preparation, an introduction to the presence of God, prayer and silence."

Teaching and preparation

Due to analysis of the eight teaching actions it is quite apparent that all participants have a common insight to plan and complete teaching with a variety of forms of didactic and learning – no matter if they call it teaching or preparation. In other words, the methods of teaching are shared in a cultural idea of what teaching is like. Dialogue, group work, writing, cooperative learning, field work etc. is common and does not exclusively belong to school or church.

BASIC FORMS OF DIDACTIC:

subject
(basic subject)

Human being

Society
(challenge)

Pupil
(etno)

FIGURE 1

Basic forms of didactic

BASIC FORMS OF LEARNING:

Verbal
communication

Cognitive
activity

Social
activity

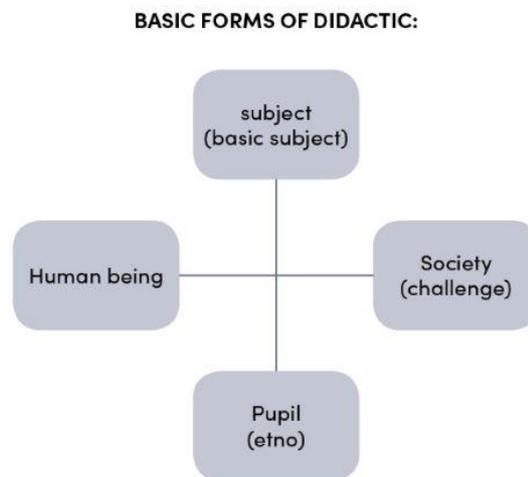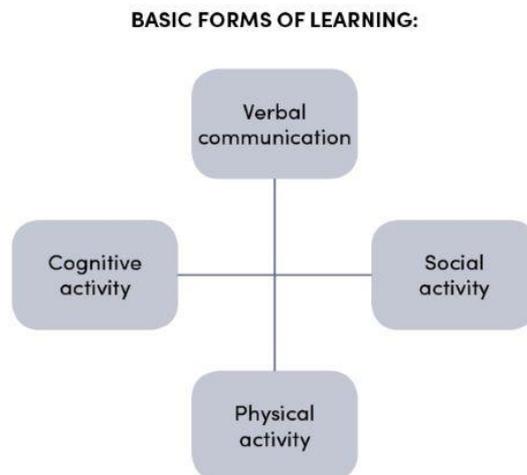Physical
activity

FIGURE 2

Basic forms of learning

In the basic forms of didactic we found that all teachers and vicars were aware how
to integrate the life world (etno) of the pupil. One of the vicars reflects upon the
difficulty to integrate the passages of the Bible as planned. This teaching action focused
in the outset to associate sexuality, body and creation. The intention was to enhance
knowledge of each other's limits and how to interact and respect one another. The
teaching was challenging current issues of bodies in social medias as commodity with

little room for empathy and the plurality of religious groups and ideas of body and purity.

In the school context three of the teachers chose challenging teaching, two with reflection on evil and one involving the pupils in definitions of 'the good life'. These three actions bore the mark of teachers with clear goals of subject matter, what they aimed to achieve. They were engaging pupils in defined tasks of talking, writing and discussing. The teacher in 6th grade worked inductive, beginning in two different myths without defining the subject matter for the class. The pupils were searching together on the class and in groups, working to see what kind of criteria characterised myths and engaging in their own experimental writing of myths. Two of the vicars included aesthetic processes as they made space for creative expressions of the life world. The preparation for confirmation is oriented towards confidentiality of the service and worship. Typically, they changed the frame as they walked from church to classroom and thereby mixed forms of catechesis and preaching.
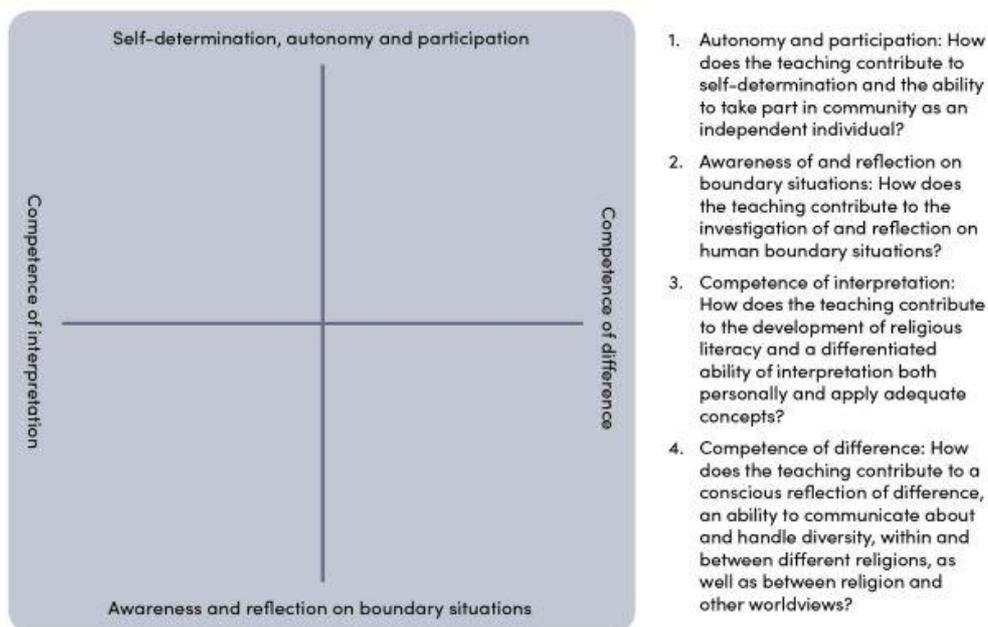

FIGURE 3

Basic aspects of religious education

Due to the model of basic forms of religious education, the four different aspects are pointed out specifically in connection with leaning activities. It becomes clear that a learning activity has a possible scope, for example how and with what content the teacher Jesper in a theme of 'evil' is combining time for individual reflection with classroom conversations. The lesson opens with the provocative question "Some persons are evil!" and thus the teacher invites and challenges the pupils to take a stand, whereby the aspect of autonomy is in possible consideration. Jesper combines the

competence of interpretation and difference, when he makes an effort to have a clear focus on interpretation, which involves terminology and literacy of RE with personal reflection, and he notes that exercises with elements of interchange of position increases insight in perspective of one's own and of the other's. This helps the development of a conscious reflection on difference.

The teacher Jette considers that in teaching the theme of 'evil' the pupils can have the possibility to develop a more nuanced language together of meaning, loss of meaning, coincidence, whereby they get involved in fundamental questions which contribute to their consciousness of conditions concerning limit situations of human existence. As her focus was development of language, she chose to facilitate a conversation in class by short conflicting philosophical and religious quotations. This exercise made the pupils formulate and discuss enigmatic observations. For example, as one pupil put it: 'To know all is not the same as to do the right thing." The pupils had to make up their mind, and they were challenged, as the quotations did not always fit their preunderstanding.

The priest, Jakob chose the subject of prayer. In the context of the church prayer is not so much a subject as a practice. All the participating vicars practice prayer with the confirmands. In the teaching at school it might also be a subject for study and reflection, but not a practice. In that regard the distinction is clear. But on the level of didactic approach Jacob chose a methodology that we might also find in the school. The confirmands were sent out to different members of the congregation in order to interview them about their practice of prayer. The idea behind this approach was that the confirmands are not familiar with the practice of praying. Jakob shared this assumption of religious practice as something distant or unfamiliar with the teacher Eva. At the first seminar for teachers she reflected on this challenge, "Few of my pupils are religious. Their relation to religion is more of a cultural matter… The personal meetings with representatives of the different religions have had a major impact. Religion is something strange to them. It is a distance relation. They know religion from movies or something they heard."

The analysis based on the three different models (fig. 1, 2, and 3) helped us to distinguish between different levels in the comparison of vicars and teachers. Whereas the aims of religious education differ in the two contexts, the didactics to some extend overlap. At the final seminar with both groups this became clear as there were many examples of exchange and mutual inspiration on the level of didactics as well as the choice of subjects. Our attention was also drawn to some unexpected differences. The physical space of teaching became an issue in the sense that teachers feel very much restricted by and to the classroom, whereas the vicars have the possibility of changing locations from the actual church to the rooms reserved for teaching. Finally, it also became clear that both vicars and priests realized that they lack knowledge about religious education in the other context. On the level of religious literacy this may be a relevant area for further research (cf. Berglund and Gent, 2018).

Models as a tool for planning and evaluation

As both researchers in the project are also teacher educators, the analysis of the empirical material made us all along reflect on the relevance of the teaching actions and the fourfold model for student teachers. We were wondering how we could stimulate an educational dialogue on didactics reflecting the aim of RE within the scope of general pedagogy. The project stimulated reflection on how action research can enhance the most needed connection between experienced teachers, research and teacher education. Therefore, we chose to communicate the research in a way that could be relevant and accessible for student teachers. First, we analysed the eight pieces of lesson studies written by the eight participants due to the basic forms of didactics and learning.

Subsequently, we connected the two models of didactic and learning to the model of basic aspects of RE in order to complement the communication on didactic and learning with the content knowledge of RE towards authoritativeness.

The aim of the three models in combination is to encourage and help the students to engage in developing the complex language of didactic, learning and content knowledge of RE, and to be aware of the different forms in combination when planning and evaluating methods, themes and the task of teaching. We imagined the model to be useful in planning the curriculum for a lengthy period, for example of a school term.

During autumn 2018 we had the opportunity to apply this approach in teacher education using the three models in combination as tools to reflect the processes of planning and evaluation of school lessons of RE. The models of the basic forms of didactic and learning (fig. 1 & 2) can make the student teachers aware of planning with variation in both content and method, in order to challenge the social and cognitive dynamics and consider both existential and social conditions and questions. The model of basic aspects of religious education stimulates the broader pedagogical reflection of RE through the four different aspects of educating towards religious authoritativeness/ competence.

We see the model as useful in planning the curriculum for a lengthy period, for example of a school term. If a student teacher were to place the different themes and methods in the four different squares, it could enhance an awareness of planning a variety of themes, and considering how they could let the pupils work with different sides of the phenomenon of religious thinking and acting.

But we also found that the model needs some specification of the four aspects. Therefore, we elaborated on the meaning of each of the four aspects and formulated a didactic question for each in order to support the reflection of students (or in teams).

The top point of the model is the aspect of autonomy and participation:
This aspect is related to human freedom and the conditions of modernity: that maturity is the 'courage to use one's own reason' – also in relation to religion. Politically this aspect finds expression through the principle of religious freedom. Benner has stressed that in modernity man is open both in his own existence and in co-existence. This conditional openness indicates a change in the process of formation to "express the

search for meaning rather than the confirmation of an established norm" (Oettingen, 2007).

Didactic question: How does the teaching contribute to self-determination and the ability to take part in communities as an independent individual?

The bottom point of the vertical line is the awareness of and reflection on "boundary situations":

This is a term coined by Karl Jaspers, which Hannah Arendt explains in her late work on thinking as characteristic for the general, unchanging human condition – "That I cannot live without struggling and suffering; that I cannot avoid guilt; that I must die." (Arendt, 1978, 192). Arendt connects the limit situations to "the simple fact that life itself, limited by birth and death is a boundary affair in that my worldly existence always forces me to take account of a past when I was not yet, and a future when I shall be no more." The line autonomy – boundary situations thus indicates that religious ideas and practices can encompass, symbolize and reflect on the limits of human power/ self-determination.

Didactic question: How does the teaching contribute to the investigation of and reflection on human boundary situations?

At the horizontal line, we connect the competence of interpretation to the competence of difference:

The competence of interpretation is central to religious education and we relate it partly to the development of religious literacy (Breidlid, 2014), and partly to a broad definition of texts (including images, building, rituals, and symbols). The competence of interpretation includes both the history of religions and lived religion.

Didactic question: How does the teaching contribute to the development of religious literacy and differentiated ability of interpretation both personally and to apply adequate concepts?

At the other end of the horizontal line, we place the competence of difference:
The practice of dialogue and the implementation of a dialogical methodology can enhance the ability to investigate and understand difference between religions, between religion and non-religion and between different interpretations of each (Kristensen, 2008), and thus being able to engage in communities of difference (Iversen, 2012). This includes being able to communicate about and handle differences between religions, within religions and between religion and other systems/ forms of reason.

Didactic question: How does the teaching contribute to a conscious reflection of differences, an ability to communicate about and handle diversity within and between different religions, as well as between religion and other worldviews?

Conclusion and further perspectives

A basic condition of religious education - in both school and church is that we cannot assume that children have a practical and lived experience with faith and religion. We are facing what Benner calls a broken transmission, as we can no longer assume that religion is an active form of practice that will be passed on from one generation to the next (Benner, 2005: 138). Thus, the challenge of "teaching religion without a living faith" may be comparable to "teaching swimming without water" (Oettingen, A. v. 2014). Both teachers and vicars experience the didactic task of introducing and representing a subject matter for which the learners may have no, very weak or differentiated experience and comprehension.

The similarities and differences of teaching in school and church demand a more nuanced description than the demarcation confessional – non confessional offer. On the idea of teaching there are many similarities. The same applies to values as freedom, integrity of the self, courage to make up your mind and raise your voice, cooperation, community and so forth. The obvious aspects that show nuanced differences is on how teachers and vicars go about the competence of participation. In school the teachers reflect and discuss how to present religious practices. When is it an enlightening experience to try out a meditation, sing a hymn etc.? For the vicars the rituals are part of the framework. Just as they interchange between the church and the classroom, so they switch freely between teaching about and doing the rituals. The aim of preparation is to connect between the world of the confirmand and the confidentiality of worship and service.

The variation of experience /no experience in relation to faith and religion was one of the factors that led us to the fourfold model of education for religious competence, as we see a need to expand the didactic reflection to include other aspects than conditions of religious plurality and co-existence. Whereas we find both important, the model is an attempt to draw up a broader field of the formation in RE. Based on the inspiration from philosophy of education and the experiences from the action research project, we suggest the following unfoldment of the model of Educating towards religious competence:

The dynamic of the model is the four different aspects and the interplay between them. We express each aspect through some key words and a didactic question. The idea is not that every lesson should include all four aspects, but rather that the teacher (or vicar) may use the model to analyse a whole lesson plan and to make conscious didactic choices.

In teacher education, we need to bridge theory and research with the practical experiences of teaching in primary and secondary school. In the recent decade, we find a turn towards more dialogue with the field of praxis in RE research expressed through the application of action research. The preliminary results of the project at hand indicate that this 'turn towards praxis' can contribute to a closer connection and communication between researchers/ teacher educators and practicing teachers. This may be done in various ways. Teacher students can benefit from the reports on didactic experiments of the eight participants. Didactic planning and evaluation can go a step deeper by the three

models and thereby gain awareness of balance between forms of learning, didactic and religious competence/ authoritativeness. Models create structures for thinking through categories and considering the complex processes in teaching.

The strength of action research lays very much in the process of cooperation. As teacher educators and researchers, we have learned a lot from participation in the classroom and church as well as the dialogue and mutual reflection at the seminars.

References

Andersen, K. M & Liengaard, I. (2007). Medborgerskab og minoriterne. I Korsgaard, O. Skovmand K. Sigurdsson, L. (Eds.): *Medborgerskab – et nyt dannelsesideal?* Frederiksberg: Religionspædagogisk Forlag.

Andersen, K. M. & Sigurdsson, L. (2019), Praksisnær viden og refleksion over religion og dannelse. I *Tidsskrift for Professionsstudier*. Nr. 29.
https://tidsskrift.dk/tipro/article/view/116406/164518

Andersen, K. M. (2015). Sekularisering og religion. En studie i fortællingens nøglerolle i folkeskolens religionsundervisning, Ph.d.-afhandling. Emdrup: Aarhus Universitet.

Arendt, H. (1978) [1971]. *The Life of the Mind*. Orlando: Harcourt Books.

Bakker, C. & Montessori, N. M. (2016). *Complexity in Education. From Horror to Passion*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Benner, D. (1980). Das Theorie-Praxis-Problem in der Erziehungswissenschft und die Frage nach Prinzipien paedagogischen Denkens und Handlens. I *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 26, 4. 485-497.

Benner, Dietrich (2005). *Tekster til dannelsesfilosofi – mellem etik, pædagogik og politik*. Aarhus: Klim.

Benner, D. (2014). Einleitung & Thesen zur Bedeutung der Religion für die Bildung. Hinweise auf Propria des pädagogiscehn und des religiösen Denkens und Handlens. I *Bildung und Religion. Nur einem bildsamen Wesen kann ein Gott sich offenbaren.* 7-24. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

Benner, D. & Brüggen, F. (2011). *Geschichte der Pädagogik: Vom Beginn der Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*. Ditzingen: Reclam Philipp Jun.

Berglund, J. & Gent, B (2018). Memorization and focus: important transferables between supplementary Islamic education and mainstream schooling. In *Journal of Religious Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-018-0060-1

Bojesen, L. B. (2014). *Tilblivelsen af myndighed.* Askov: Forlaget Nyt Askov.

Breidlid, H. (2014). Tekstkompetanse og metabevissthet i RLE: Funn fra en kvalitativ studie i to flerkulturelle 10. klasser. I Kleve, B. Penne, S. Skaar, H. (Eds.). *Literacy og fagdidaktikk i skole og lærerutdanning*. Kapittel 5. 106-148. Oslo: Novus Forlag.

Buchardt, M. (2014). Religious Education in Schools in Denmark. I Rothgangel, M. Jäggle, M. Skeie, G. (Eds.) *Religious Education in Schools in Europe*. (Wiener Forum für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, Vienna University Press, 3), p.45-74. Vienna: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Buchardt, M. (Ed.) (2016). *Religionsdidaktik. Traditioner og tilgange*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Formal aims of Christianity Studies, 2019:
https://emu.dk/grundskole/kristendomskundskab

Formal aims of preparation for confirmation, 2014:
https://www.retsinformation.dk/forms/R0710.aspx?id=164454

Franken, L. & Loobouyck, P. (2017). Neutrality and impartiality in RE: an impossible aim? I *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2017 Vol. 39, No. 1.

Haakedal, E. (2015). Action research and development work in religion and world view education – comparing communities of practice and cooperative networks. *Nordidactica*. 5 (2). 47 – 72.

Huggler, J. (2008). Viden, tro og tænkning. I Frandsen, H. V. (red). *Pædagogiske værdier og religion*. 13-35. Emdrup: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitetsforlag.

Iversen, H. R. (2012). Sekulariseringens betydning. *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift*. (58), 33-49. https://doi.org/10.7146/rt.v0i58.7660

Jackson, R. (2009). *The Interpretive Approach to Religious Education and the Development of a Community of Practice.* University of Warwick. Waxmann Verlag, p. 21-31 http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/2928/

Johannesen, Ø. L. (2015). Negotiating and reshaping Christian values and professional identities through action research: Experiential learning and professional development among Christian religious education teachers. *Educational Action Research* 23 (3), p. 331-349. DOI: 10.1080/09650792.2015.1009141

Klafki, W. (2011/1996). *Dannelsesteori og didaktik – nye studier*. 3. udgave. Pædagogik til tiden. Aarhus: Klim.

Komischke-Konnerup, L. (2019). Benner og pædagogik-praktisk eksperiment og videnskab. I Oettingen, A. v. (red.) *Pædagogiske tænkere. Bidrag til empirisk dannelsesforskning*. p. 169-183. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Kühle & Vejrup (2017). Nyt om religion i Danmark. CSR e-årbog, 2017. Århus https://tidsskrift.dk/rid/issue/view/3651

Lippe, M. vd L. & Undheim, S. (2017). Eds. *Religion i skolen. Didaktiske perspektiver på religions- og livssynsfaget*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Oettingen, A. v. (2007). Medborgerskab – skolens nye dannelsesopgave? I Korsgaard,
O. Sigurdsson, L. Skovmand, K. (red). *Medborgerskab – et nyt dannelsesideal?* P
123-160. Frederiksberg: Religionspædagogisk Forlag.

Oettingen, A. v. (2011). *Almen Pædagogik. Pædagogikkens grundlæggende
spørgsmål*. København: Gyldendal.

Oettingen, A. v. (2014). Kan tro stadig være en skolesag? Kronik i Kristeligt Dagblad.
København, 13. juni 2014, https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kronik/2014-07-13/kan-
tro-stadig-v%C3%A6re-en-skolesag

Rönnerman, K. (2013). *Aktionsforskning i praksis – erfaringer og refleksioner.*
Aarhus: Klim.

Sigurdsson, L. (2007). Medborgerskab mellem religion, kultur og politik. I Korsgaard,
O. Sigurdsson, L. Skovmand, K. (Eds.). *Medborgerskab – et nyt dannelsesideal?* P
123-160. Frederiksberg: Religionspædagogisk Forlag.

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

Skeie, G. (2013). A Contextual Turn in Research on Religion and education. I Skeie,
G. Everington, J. Avest, I. Miedema S. (Eds.) *Exploring Context in Religious
Education Research. Empirical Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives*., p. 249-
272 Münster: Waxmann Verlag.

Skeie, G. (2017). Kan og bør religionsfaget bidra til personlig utvikling? Religion i
skolen. I Von der Lippe, M. S. Undheim, S. (Eds.) *Didaktiske perspektiver på
religions- og livssynsfaget*. Oslo. Universitetsforlaget.

Skovmand, K. (2018). *I bund og grund - lærerprofessionens didaktik?*
Ph.d.-afhandling. Aarhus: DPU, Aarhus Universitet.

Skovmand, K. (2019). Biesta og pædagogik – dannelse og undervisning i ny
belysning. I Oettingen, A.v. (Eds.). *Pædagogiske tænkere. Bidrag til empirisk
dannelsesforskning*, p. 215-228. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Tofteng, D. & Husted, M. (2012). Aktionsforskning. I Juul, Pedersen, B. (Eds.)
Samfundsvidenskabernes videnskabsteori. En indføring. København: Hans Reitzels
Forlag.